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Formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales: phase 1 synthesis report

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Formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales: phase 1 synthesis report

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Glossary

AfL

Assessment for Learning

ALN

Additional Learning Needs

Area(s)

Area(s) of Learning and Experience

Disabled learner

This refers to any learner whose parents answered ‘Yes’ in response to the question in the survey that asked whether they believed their child had learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for their child to learn.

EOTAS

Education other than at school – includes Pupil Referral Units and other EOTAS provision.

LSW

Learning support workers – used to refer to teaching assistants and higher level teaching assistants

Practitioners

Used to refer collectively to senior leaders, teachers and learning support workers.

PRU

Pupil Referral Unit

Qualitative studies

This refers to the four qualitative study reports published in July 2025

Qualitative research

This refers to the four qualitative study reports published in July 2025 and evidence from curriculum journeys research.

Structural equation modelling

A complex statistical technique used to explore relationships between grouped sets of questions (factors) in the survey to examine the strength of relationships between these.

ToC

Theory of Change

1. Executive summary

Background and methodology

1.1. The Welsh Government commissioned Arad Research to lead a formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales, working alongside Cardiff Metropolitan University, Bangor University, the Open University in Wales, the University of Stirling, the University of Auckland and AlphaPlus Consultancy.

1.2. This report provides a synthesis of evaluation evidence collected between May 2024 and September 2025 during the first phase of the formative evaluation. The report is structured around sections of the theory of change (ToC), developed to support the evaluation of the curriculum reforms in Wales, specifically:

- curriculum design practices, pedagogical practices and assessment practices
- enablers and constraints
- emerging outcomes

Methodology

1.3. This synthesis draws on findings from the following research activity and, where relevant, publications.

- Four qualitative studies with schools and settings focused on:
  - Equity and inclusion in the Curriculum for Wales
  - Curriculum and assessment design and pedagogy in the Curriculum for Wales
  - Realising the Curriculum for Wales in Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) provision including Pupil Referral Units
  - Health and Well-being Area of learning and experience in the Curriculum for Wales

  (Fieldwork for these qualitative studies was carried out in summer and autumn 2024, with reports published in July 2025.)
- A survey of 925 senior leaders and teachers.
- A survey of 1094 parents/carers and 757 of their children (Reception to Year 9)[Footnote 1]

[1] Age-appropriate questions were designed, with some variations in which questions were shown, and the wording of questions presented, to learners of different ages.

(Fieldwork for both surveys was carried out between September and December 2024 and both reports were published in December 2025.)

- Curriculum journeys case study research: this phase of the research involves longitudinal` research with a sample of 10 schools over three waves of engagement in summer/autumn 2024 and 2025, with another wave planned for 2026. Fieldwork so far provides a rich snapshot and so some findings have been included in this report. A stand-alone report covering changes observed across waves is planned for late 2026.

1.4. For this synthesis, the findings of the six reports referenced above and data collected during research with curriculum journeys schools were analysed through systematic searches using NVivo software. Search terms were developed iteratively, using both deductive and inductive approaches, informed by the terminology used in the ToC as well as the research tools and data collected.

1.5. The report refers to proportions (e.g. 'minority', 'majority', 'vast majority') using the same thresholds as used in the survey reports.[Footnote 2] The phrase 'qualitative studies' is used when referring solely to the four qualitative reports published in July 2025. 'Qualitative research' is used when collectively referring to the four published qualitative studies and evidence from the curriculum journeys research. The term 'practitioners' is used when referring collectively to senior leaders, teachers and learning support workers (LSWs). References to 'evidence' signify evidence collected as part of the formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales rather than wider evidence, for example academic research or publications by other organisations in the Welsh education sector.

Methodological limitations

1.6. The report highlights limitations associated with the studies and approach, notably:

- Most studies provide a snapshot of practices during an iterative and evolving process of curriculum realisation, which limits the ability to explore progress over time
- In order to minimise participant burden, participants' responses could not be fully probed on all topics

[2] 'vast majority' = 85% or more; 'majority' = between 59% and 84%; 'around half' = between 42% and 58%; 'minority' = between 15% and 41%; 'small minority = 15% or less. It should be noted that these descriptors are not applied to findings that draw on qualitative sources of evidence, where the terms 'most', 'many' or 'some' are used to signify the prevalence of findings or weight of evidence.

- Sample levels in the qualitative studies mean that qualitative findings, while providing rich, in-depth insights into participants' experiences and perspectives, and the context behind these, are not generalisable to the whole population. These have been synthesised together with survey responses to provide both breadth and depth of evidence.
- Most qualitative research did not include the perspectives of learners; learners' and parents/carers' views will be explored more through further planned research
- The survey of learners did not include those below Reception age (3-4 years old)
- There is a risk of selection bias across the evaluation; schools and parents/carers opting to participate may have been those that were more engaged or, alternatively, those motivated to highlight concerns

Main findings

Curriculum design practices

1.7. Findings show that many schools have made substantial changes to their curriculum design informed by the Curriculum for Wales Framework. Curriculum planning was reported to have incorporated the four purposes; curricula were organised in a way that reflected the six Areas of Learning and Experience and in response to the statements of what matters for each Area. Many leaders valued the flexibility to tailor learning to learners' needs, also reflecting Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance. However, there was variability in perceptions among those in different schools and in different roles about the extent of changes to school curricula.

1.8. The evaluation evidence shows that schools involve learners and, to a lesser extent, parents and the wider community, in curriculum design but that this involvement remains relatively limited in scope and nature.

1.9. Collaboration was reported to have been central to many schools' approaches to curriculum design, mostly including collaboration between teachers within schools and, to a lesser extent, through school-to-school activity to support curriculum design. Collaborative activity was widely recognised as an important factor in supporting curriculum design and realisation, helping to foster engagement and trust, promoting reflection, and facilitating shared learning.

1.10. The majority of senior leaders and around half of teachers surveyed indicated that the approach in their school had involved a number of practices that are widely recognised as supporting rigour in curriculum design, for example professional enquiry, using educational research or sharing evidence and expertise across local networks/clusters of schools.

1.11. The majority of senior leaders and teachers surveyed reported that there was a shared understanding within their schools of how their school's curriculum supported their learners to develop in the ways described by the four purposes.

1.12. Qualitative research showed that many schools reported that their curricula sought to provide a broad and balanced education and a holistic learning experience, reflecting the aspirations of the Curriculum for Wales Framework. This included a focus on social and emotional skills, cross-curricular skills and skills integral to the four purposes and a focus on the local context and effective environments.

1.13. Qualitative research found various examples of integrative approaches to curriculum design. This included approaches that integrated curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment; approaches that sought to integrate subjects, disciplines or Areas as part of planning; and approaches that integrated elements of the Framework.

Pedagogical practices

1.14. Many senior leaders and teachers reported reasonably high levels of confidence that pedagogical practices in their schools reflected the Curriculum for Wales Framework. Around two-thirds to three-quarters of respondents agreed they were confident that their pedagogical practice, or that of teachers at their school, reflected the four purposes, the statements of what matters, the 12 pedagogical principles and the principles of progression. Survey data revealed some variation by role: a consistently higher proportion of senior leaders, compared with teachers, agreed that their pedagogical practice, or that of teachers at their school, aligned with the Framework. This reflected the general pattern observed in the survey data, where more positive views were expressed by senior leaders compared with teachers.

1.15. The evaluation has found substantial changes in schools to pedagogical practice in response to Curriculum for Wales. These changes were reported to have involved a greater focus on enquiry, experiential, and authentic learning approaches, often supported by practitioners paying closer attention to the purpose of the content being taught and the needs of their learners.

1.16. Most schools involved in qualitative research reported that they were using differentiated pedagogies and strategies in response to individual learner needs and interests. These schools emphasised the importance of frequent review and self-evaluation to ensure their pedagogical practices were meeting learners' needs.

1.17. Practitioners have devoted considerable attention to developing pedagogical approaches that help establish and maintain learner engagement. Practitioners from across various settings taking part in the qualitative studies described efforts to ensure engagement through a focus on experiences that were relevant, authentic and purposeful.

1.18. Some primary and secondary qualitative study participants described a change in emphasis in pedagogical approaches to incorporate practitioner-led or direct teaching alongside a growing focus on what was variously described as 'teacher as facilitator' or learner-centred approaches. This is consistent with the pedagogical principles set out in Curriculum for Wales which states that good learning and teaching involves 'employing a blend of approaches including direct teaching'.

1.19. Despite adaptations to practice, there remains variability across the system in these changes. This variability is pronounced between primary and secondary: primary schools generally reported having adopted more holistic and interdisciplinary approaches; while secondary schools also reported changes to practice, there was less evidence of widescale change.

Assessment practices

1.20. There have been substantial changes to assessment practices, including the development of new assessment models, and the introduction of new practices, informed by the C Framework and focused on understanding and supporting individual learner progress. While changes to assessment models and processes have taken place, practitioners recognised the need to continue to review and refine curriculum and assessment arrangements.

1.21. Variable accounts were provided according to those in different contexts and roles. The evaluation found that senior leaders and teachers in secondary schools reported that they had experienced challenges in developing assessment practices under the new arrangements more frequently than those in primary schools.

1.22. Across many schools and settings, senior leaders and teachers explained that changes to assessment practices had involved a pronounced shift from summative and attainment-focused assessment towards more formative and individualised

approaches. Many schools and settings considered that the introduction of Curriculum for Wales supported a positive shift towards more holistic approaches to assessment for all learners, particularly senior leaders and teachers in primary schools and in EOTAS provision, where more tailored assessment practices were considered to better meet diverse learner needs. The vast majority of leaders and majority of teachers surveyed reported that teaching practices use Assessment for Learning principles.

1.23. Practitioners and learners who contributed to qualitative research reported that learners were increasingly involved in assessment through the introduction of, or renewed emphasis on, peer- and self-assessment. They reported that peer-assessment and self-assessment helped foster greater learner ownership and understanding of their progress.

1.24. The evaluation heard mixed views from learners about the support available to help them understand their progress. Learners generally reported feeling informed about their progress, with primary school learners more likely than secondary learners to respond positively in survey responses to questions about understanding progression in their learning. Some learners engaged in qualitative research felt that feedback on tasks and assessments was not always constructive and was sometimes unclear.

1.25. Some schools continued to use assessment approaches – such as the use of generic level descriptors – that were perceived to work, but which were not well aligned with the aspirations of Curriculum for Wales. Some senior leaders and teachers commented on the perceived vagueness of the guidance on assessment and progression.

Enablers and constraints

1.26. Evaluation evidence to date provides insights into the conditions that are conducive to, or support, successful enactment of the Curriculum for Wales Framework. The synthesis report concludes that curriculum change and enactment has been either enabled or constrained by the following factors:

- **Leadership**: purposeful leadership, focused on an inclusive, supportive environment, a shared vision, practitioner agency and enquiry-based approaches to curriculum practice, was perceived to be a strong enabler. Conversely, the success of new curriculum approaches was reported to be contingent on individual leadership capability, meaning that variability across

the system arose where this capability was lacking, thereby constraining consistent, high-quality curriculum realisation.

- **Professional learning**: professional learning was seen as a key enabler of design, pedagogy and assessment practices, given the complexity of curriculum and the extent of changes to practice required by Curriculum for Wales; however limited time and financial resources, along with workload pressures, continue to restrict access and engagement, leaving many senior leaders and teachers without sufficient support to meet their professional learning needs.
- **Collaboration**: collaboration – both formal and informal – was considered important for curriculum development, helping practitioners share expertise, build confidence, and innovate together. Qualitative research found that collaboration (in-school collaboration and school-to-school working) made a substantial difference to schools' approaches to curriculum realisation and adaptations to pedagogy.
- **Professional enquiry**: where professional enquiry was taking place it was viewed as a valuable means of fostering a reflective culture within schools and supporting innovative practices. Some schools reported embedding enquiry through collaborative research, supporting thinking about new pedagogies and assessment practices. Conversely, some practitioners felt limited by the emphasis on professional enquiry, preferring basic guidance over complex research-based models. Adoption of professional enquiry was not widespread, with survey data indicating lower engagement among teachers than among senior leaders.
- **Curriculum design capability**: while senior leaders and teachers are expected to co-construct learner-centred curricula, many practitioners lacked prior expertise in curriculum design, leading to inconsistent approaches across settings. Evidence indicates that curriculum capability was strengthened where leaders established specific roles; however overall confidence in curriculum design was not widespread, particularly among teachers, with survey results showing that just over half of teachers expressed confidence in their own curriculum design expertise.
- **Guidance and exemplification**: The Curriculum for Wales Framework has driven significant change by providing the statutory structure for local curriculum design and supporting more learner centred teaching. However

many practitioners felt that elements of Welsh Government guidance have been unclear, inconsistent, and insufficient to meet their needs.

- **Time and capacity**: the lack of sufficient time and financial resources to support areas such as curriculum design, professional learning and collaboration were reported to have been a significant constraint.
- **Teacher agency**: the freedom and flexibility afforded under the Framework was widely welcomed by practitioners. However, this agency was constrained by the resulting lack of standardisation across the system, causing practitioners anxiety that local curricula might later be judged unsuitable and forced to change.

Emerging outcomes

Emerging outcomes for learners

1.27. Most learners involved in the curriculum journeys research reported positive experiences through Curriculum for Wales. Many learners expressed satisfaction with their learning, noting that their school provided appropriate support. Many learners reported feeling supported to make progress and some also reported feeling empowered through greater ownership of their learning. Survey results showed that the majority of learners enjoyed school, enjoyed what they were learning and felt their teachers helped them to understand when they were getting better at learning. Around half of learners felt they could be themselves at school (asked of Year 3-9 learners only), got all the help they needed, and that school was fair for everyone.

1.28. The majority of learners surveyed agreed that their learning at school was helping them progress towards most aspects of the four purposes and also expressed positive views in relation to their well-being.

1.29. Survey data revealed mixed views among learners about the opportunities given to them to influence their school curriculum, with a higher percentage of primary school learners indicating that they were consulted about curriculum design. Learners who participated in discussion groups mostly disagreed with or were unsure that they have a say in what they learn about in school.

1.30. Learners were perceived by many senior leaders and teachers to be more engaged in their educational journey following the introduction of the curriculum reforms. Practitioners felt that this was because the reforms had acted as a catalyst for

overhauling pedagogical approaches toward enquiry, experiential, and authentic learning which was helping to improve engagement.

1.31. There were, however, variations between different types of learners: primary learners were generally more positive than secondary learners, and disabled learners also reported less positive experiences than non-disabled learners. The formative evaluation evidence consistently pointed to notable variability in experiences across the system, raising concerns among some practitioners about equity of experiences for learners.

Emerging outcomes for parents and carers

1.32. Most schools reported engaging with parents as part of their curriculum design through surveys and other communication methods, although experiences varied: some parents felt listened to and motivated to support their child's learning, others believed that schools did not actively seek or respond to their feedback.

1.33. Survey findings indicated that there is a relationship between parent agency (being listened to, having confidence in and being motivated to support their child's education) and their meaningful engagement in curriculum design.

1.34. Parents' confidence in and satisfaction with the curriculum at their child's school was mixed, including its ability to meet individual learner needs and the extent to which the curriculum, teaching and learning was helping their child to progress and prepare them for the next steps in their education, work and life more generally. Parents of disabled learners reported less confidence in the quality of education and in their school's ability to meet their child's needs compared to parents of non-disabled learners. Some parents raised concerns about insufficient focus on skills development and around the clarity of assessment, highlighting the need for more consistent school-parent communication and support.

Emerging outcomes for practitioners

1.35. The evaluation has found clear commitment to Curriculum for Wales among senior leaders and teachers, with many embracing the principles of the Framework and the flexibility it offers to tailor learning to local needs, enabling schools to realise a more inclusive curriculum for all learners. Evidence indicates that the reforms have contributed to senior leaders' and teachers' sense of purpose and encouraged creativity, leading some schools to re-evaluate their ethos and approaches.

1.36. The majority of senior leaders and teachers expressed confidence that the school curriculum would support learners to develop in the ways described in the four purposes and support learners equally well to progress regardless of their individual circumstances or starting point. The majority of senior leaders and around half of teachers were confident their new curriculum (compared to the previous curriculum) would better meet the needs of all learners, help learners reach their full potential, lead to improved learner progression and improve overall levels of learners' achievement.

1.37. However, this positive outlook was also accompanied by a note of caution, both in the survey and qualitative research, with senior leaders and teachers expressing the need for increased support and resources. Some practitioners also expressed the view that the Framework was too open to interpretation and had resulted in an increased workload.

1.38. Overall, there is confidence that the curriculum supports learner development and progression, however findings suggest that sustaining progress and achieving longer term outcomes for learners and the wider system will require ongoing support and investment.

Issues for consideration

1.39. The insights from this evaluation give rise to three important issues to prioritise as part of the next stage of the curriculum realisation journey across Wales. These priorities are:

i. **Tackling variability in curriculum realisation across the system:** this includes variability in how the Framework has been understood and interpreted, the extent and quality of its enactment, and how it has been experienced by learners and parents/carers.

ii. **Enhancing and deepening practitioner understanding of the Curriculum for Wales Framework,** encouraging greater ambition among schools, settings and all system partners in making use of the flexibility afforded by the Framework.

iii. **Strengthening and enhancing further the quality of curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment practices** to increase rigour, build capability, and improve practice in ways that positively impact all learners' experience and outcomes.

1.40. The enablers introduced earlier in this report provide a focus for curriculum realisation efforts – leadership, professional learning, collaboration, curriculum design capability, guidance, time and capacity. Considering those enablers in light of the particular priorities outlined about tackling variability, deepening understanding, and enhancing the quality of practice leads us to propose three pillars that should underpin the approach to addressing the priorities. We also make explicit why each pillar is important for the three priority issues outlined above. The pillars are:

a. **A system perspective** that recognises the interconnectedness and interactions between parts of the system (the organisations, agencies, initiatives, policies, programmes, tools and resources etc.) that support curriculum realisation.

   A system perspective is important for:

   - **tackling variability** because it positions the system as a whole as responsible for variability – all players have a role to play, and a role in supporting others.
   - **deepening understanding** because those in different parts of the system bring different perspectives to what aspects of the curriculum mean, and the perspectives of partners from across the system can help enhance and deepen understanding.
   - **enhancing the quality of professional practice** because the work of those across the system determines how conducive the conditions are for teachers and leaders to explore new practices

b. **A networked infrastructure for curriculum leadership** that a) recognises ongoing success is dependent on the relationships between those working to support curriculum realisation and b) is focused on and conducive to developing curriculum leadership efficacy, solving problems and supporting improvement in curriculum, teaching and learning. It is important to underline that curriculum leaders can be senior leaders and teachers in a wide range of positions, i.e. those who lead and/or participate in networks with a view to leading aspects of curriculum realisation in their schools or settings.

   A networked infrastructure for curriculum leadership is important for:

- **tackling variability** because it creates networks of relationships that will allow information, resources, ideas, expertise etc. to flow across the system
- **deepening understanding** because it builds relationships that connect people with different understandings and strengths in ways that they become resources for each other.
- **enhancing the quality of professional practice** because it supports increased trust that is essential to taking well-considered risks, trying new things, sharing challenges and supporting colleagues learning.

c. **A systematic and robust approach to professional learning that is embedded as part of schools' curriculum design activity.** This should allow for sustained, rigorous professional enquiry, integrating insights and expertise from research and practice, the sharing of expertise across the system and collaboration that effects change and strengthens the capability of all involved and the capacity of the system. In practice, this could involve employing participative enquiry-based approaches to professional learning that both support professional development and inform curriculum development/realisation at the same time.

   A systematic and embedded approach to professional learning is important for:

   - **tackling variability** because it can be systematically focused on parts of the system, and aspects of the curriculum where the need is greatest
   - **deepening understanding** because its robustness allows for weak spots to be addressed, and gaps between what is actually happening and what was intended to be addressed. Robust approaches support teachers to progress from surface to deep understandings of the curriculum they are working with and how their practice can improve in support of that.
   - **enhancing the quality of professional practice** because it recognises the inadequacy of quick fixes, tips and tricks, and the necessity for more sustained approaches that are tightly connected to teachers' own contexts and work.

2. Introduction

2.1. In 2024 Welsh Government commissioned Arad Research to lead a formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales. Arad is working alongside a number of organisations as part of a wide-ranging programme of research, including Cardiff Metropolitan University, Bangor University, the Open University in Wales, the University of Stirling, the University of Auckland and AlphaPlus Consultancy.

2.2. This report provides a synthesis of evaluation evidence collected between May 2024 and September 2025 during the first phase of the formative evaluation. Further information on the research methods and sources of evidence for this report are set out in section 2 below.

Background to the Curriculum for Wales reforms

2.3. Curriculum for Wales is the cornerstone of the Welsh Government's efforts for educational reform and to build an education system that raises educational standards in Wales and ensures public confidence. Curriculum for Wales has four purposes which are the starting point and aspiration for every child and young person in Wales. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) 'Improving Schools in Wales' report (OECD, 2014) and Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015), the report published following Professor Graham Donaldson's independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements, set out the rationale for the reforms as well as recommendations for how to design a new curriculum fit for modern day Wales. Under the reforms each school and setting is required to develop its own curriculum, within the nationally defined Curriculum for Wales Framework, enabling learners to embody the four purposes of the curriculum by becoming:

- ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society

2.4. Under the Curriculum for Wales Framework, the four purposes are underpinned by integral skills to be developed across a wide range of learning and teaching. These integral skills are: creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, personal effectiveness and planning and organising. Subjects are organised around six Areas of Learning and Experience (Areas): Expressive Arts; Health and Well-being; Humanities; Languages, Literacy and Communication; Mathematics and Numeracy; and Science and Technology. Across these six Areas, within the Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance there are 27 statements of what matters which schools must base their curriculum on (Welsh Government, 2024a).

2.5. As part of Curriculum for Wales, literacy, numeracy and digital competence are mandatory cross-curricular skills. This means that practitioners are responsible for developing and ensuring progression in these skills across all curriculum Areas. When designing their curriculum, schools are also required to embed cross-cutting themes in learning across the curriculum. The cross-cutting themes are: relationships and sexuality education; human rights; diversity; careers and work-related experiences; and local, national and international contexts.

2.6. The Curriculum for Wales Framework specifies the principles and mandatory requirements (Welsh Government, 2022a) that should guide schools' and settings' curriculum preparation and design. The Framework refers to co-constructing the curriculum, encouraging learners, parents/carers and the wider community to contribute to its development; ensuring pedagogy supports the realisation of the four purposes; engaging with professional networks; and reflecting the local school context in curriculum development. The Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance was published in 2020, with annual updates published thereafter. These updates included the Curriculum for Wales: continuing the journey section of the guidance (published in January 2024) (Welsh Government, 2024b) that set out the priorities for curriculum development and learning, emphasising the cyclical nature of curriculum design and the steps schools should take to design, evaluate and refine their curriculum. Successful Futures (Donaldson, 2015) reflects a vision for Curriculum for Wales as a purpose driven curriculum, outlining a vision for education and the purpose of schooling throughout Wales. Phase 1 of the Camau i'r Dyfodol project found Curriculum for Wales to be most closely aligned to a process model curriculum focused on the processes of learner development. The Camau i'r Dyfodol report notes that the process model 'sees curriculum documents not as sets of outcomes but as statements of the principles and processes that education seeks to develop'

(Welsh Government, 2025a). In the case of Curriculum for Wales, the central principles are articulated through the four purposes, which are intended to "help teachers to see what their specific contributions to a child or young person's learning should be,…help children and young people, and their parents and carers, to see the point of what they are learning and how the aspects of learning fit together… [and] inform the design of national expectations for the curriculum and be used to identify and plan the content and intended outcomes" (Donaldson, 2015). The approach to learning emphasises the role of practitioners in supporting learner progress, building from learner knowledge, skills and experiences to develop towards the characteristics and dispositions outlined within the four purposes.

2.7. The Welsh Government's Enabling Learning section of Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance (Welsh Government, 2023a) supports schools in designing developmentally appropriate curricula for all learners, particularly those progressing toward Progression Step 1. It highlights three interrelated 'enablers' – enabling adults, engaging experiences, and effective environments – that collectively foster holistic development through play-based learning, outdoor learning, observation, and authentic experiences. The guidance also underscores five developmental pathways – belonging, communication, exploration, physical development, and well-being – founded in established areas of child development considered essential for supporting learners' growth and progression toward the curriculum's four purposes.

2.8. Other Welsh Government guidance and strategic plans (Welsh Government, 2023b) emphasise the need for schools to consider how their realisation of Curriculum for Wales can support wider reforms and priorities, including the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code (Welsh Government, 2021a), Cymraeg 2050 (Welsh Government, 2017), tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment and the promotion of learner health and well-being (Welsh Government, 2021b).

2.9. During the course of this research, ahead of Curriculum for Wales rollout to older learners and the introduction of new qualifications, a further section of Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance on 14 to 16 learning (Welsh Government, 2024c) has been published by Welsh Government to support practitioners to design, realise and review an inclusive curriculum for learners in Years 10 and 11. This section of guidance stipulates that all learning and teaching undertaken within Years 10 and 11 should be planned, designed, reviewed and refined in accordance with the Curriculum for Wales guidance. Schools should apply the principles of curriculum

design (Welsh Government, 2022a) to any learning experiences, including any learning that contributes to achieving a qualification.

Overview of the formative evaluation

2.10. A Scoping Study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales (Welsh Government, 2022b) set out a theory of change for the curriculum reforms and recommended that one of the studies undertaken should be a formative evaluation. The aim of the evaluation is to assess the extent to which the reforms are working as expected as set out in the Curriculum for Wales Framework (The Framework) (Welsh Government, 2025a). The formative evaluation objectives are to:

- review the theory of change (ToC) in the Scoping Study (Welsh Government, 2022b), and make revisions if necessary, in particular to take fuller account of equity within the ToC
- consider the extent to which the mechanisms in the ToC, and the anticipated activities, outputs, and short/medium-term outcomes are being realised as expected
- explore the degree of variation between approaches across schools and other provision and describe what factors and/or conditions are supporting or impeding the effective realisation of the reforms and what additional support is needed
- explore the views, practices and experiences of practitioners in schools and other settings and provision in relation to Curriculum for Wales, including to what extent and in what ways do views, experiences and practices differ for different types of practitioners and settings, and why
- explore the views and experiences of learners in schools and other settings and provision in relation to Curriculum for Wales, as well as their parents/carers, including to what extent and in what ways do views and experiences differ for different types of learners and parent/carers, and why
- draw conclusions and highlight areas for consideration for policy and practice across the whole system to support the future realisation and effectiveness of the curriculum and assessment reforms, ensuring these fully consider the breadth of the reforms across different stakeholder groups, contexts, provision and settings

2.11. The phases and sources that form the basis for this synthesis report are explained in the methodology section below.

Note on terminology in this report

2.12. Where there are references to ‘evidence’ in this report, this refers to evidence collected as part of the formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales to date. The report does not draw on wider evidence, for example academic research or publications by other organisations in the Welsh education sector.

3. Synthesis methodology

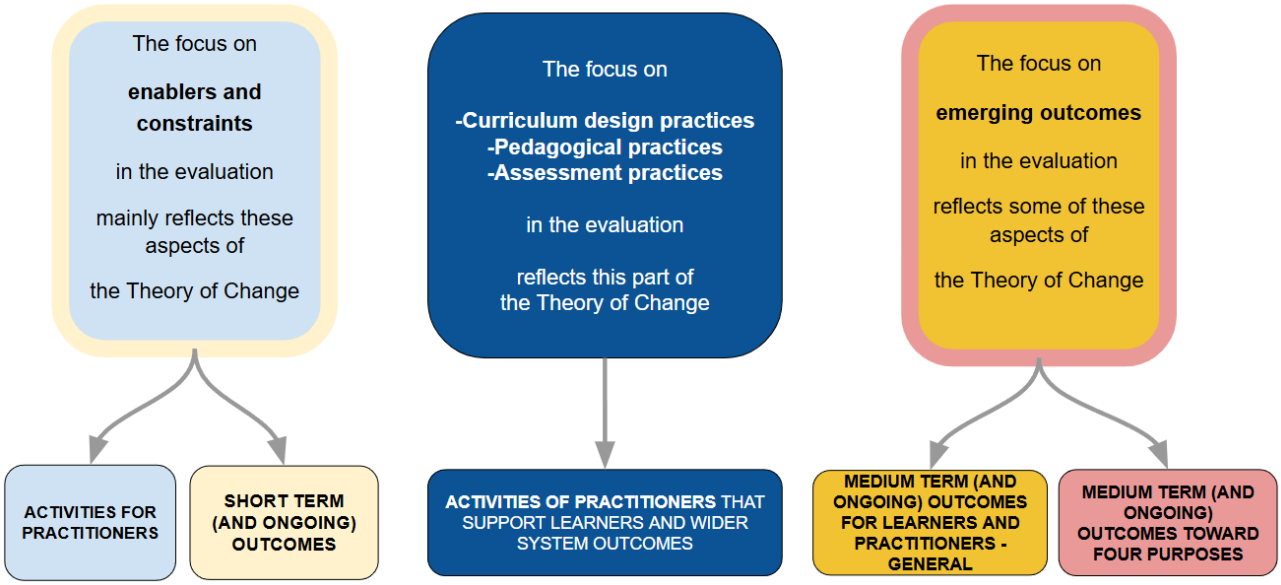
Objective of, and guiding questions for, the synthesis

3.1. The objective of this synthesis is to integrate insights from across the first phase of the formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales, which was carried out between May 2024 and September 2025, as practitioners enact Curriculum for Wales. This objective was developed with reference to the theory of change (ToC) for the curriculum reforms which was produced to guide evaluation activity relating to Curriculum for Wales. Specifically, the synthesis has been structured around sections of the ToC, namely:

- Curriculum design practices (Chapter 4), pedagogy (Chapter 5) and assessment (Chapter 6): each of which are activities of practitioners in the ToC. The rationale for selecting these activities was that the majority of evidence gathered in the evaluation related to them. Evidence relating to other activities of practitioners in the ToC – professional enquiry, self-evaluation, inclusive engagement – is integrated within these chapters.
- Enablers and constraints (Chapter 7): largely reflecting activities for practitioners and short-term outcomes in the ToC.
- Emerging outcomes (Chapter 8): reflecting some of the medium-term outcomes in the ToC).

3.2. This is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Structure of the evaluation synthesis and the theory of change



3.3. The questions guiding the synthesis are as follows:

1. What is happening in terms of professional practice (curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment) as Curriculum for Wales is enacted in schools and settings?
2. What is enabling and/or constraining curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment practices as Curriculum for Wales is enacted in schools and settings?
3. What emerging outcomes are being observed for learners, for parents/carers and for practitioners as a consequence of the enactment of Curriculum for Wales to date?

Data sources and preparation

3.4. This synthesis draws on findings from the following research activity and, where relevant, publications.

- **Four qualitative studies with schools and settings focused on:**
  - Equity and inclusion in the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2025c)
  - Curriculum and assessment design and pedagogy in the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2025d)
  - Realising the Curriculum for Wales in Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) provision including Pupil Referral Units (PRU) (Welsh Government, 2025e)
  - Health and well-being area of learning and experience in the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2025f)

  Fieldwork for these qualitative studies was carried out in in summer and autumn 2024, with reports published in July 2025. The studies were based on fieldwork with practitioners in a range of schools and settings. In total 53 schools and settings contributed to these studies. The EOTAS study also included fieldwork with nine local authority representatives.

- **A survey of senior leaders and teachers:** the survey was conducted between September and December 2024. A total of 925 senior leaders and

teachers completed the survey. The report (Welsh Government, 2025g) was published in December 2025.

- A **survey of parents/carers and learners:** the survey was conducted between September and December 2024. A total of 1094 parents/carers and 757 of their children (Reception to Year 9) completed the survey.[Footnote 3] The report (Welsh Government, 2025h) was published in December 2025. A questionnaire was designed to be completed by a parent accompanied by their child. The agreement scale options presented to learners were different to those presented to parents; e.g. emojis were included alongside the response option wording for learners. Also, different variants of questions were presented to learners in different year groups in order to ensure they were presented with questions that would be understood by those of their age.
- **Curriculum journeys** case study research: this phase of the research involves longitudinal research with a sample of 10 schools over three waves of engagement in summer/autumn 2024 and 2025, with another wave planned for 2026.

Further information on curriculum journeys research

3.5. The last of the four sources of evidence listed above, curriculum journeys research, differs from the other three in that no discrete report has, at the time of writing, been published that presents findings from this particular phase of the evaluation. This element of the evaluation is distinct from other phases in that it involves carrying out data collection with a group of schools each year over the course of the evaluation, gathering in-depth insights from a sample of ten schools over time. Fieldwork so far provides a rich snapshot and so some findings have been included in this report. A stand-alone report covering the full journey of change across waves in 2024, 2025 and 2026 is planned for late 2026.

3.6. The sample includes five primary schools, four secondary schools and one special school. To date, two rounds of research visits have been carried out with curriculum journeys schools, involving semi-structured discussions with senior leaders, practitioners and learners. A total of 18 discussion groups were held with learners

[3] Age-appropriate questions were designed, with some variations in which questions were shown, and the wording of questions presented, to learners of different ages

across the two rounds of research visits. The number of learners in these groups ranged from three to 12.

3.7. Where possible, researchers are arranging discussions with the same practitioners and learners during each round of fieldwork in order to understand whether, and to what extent, experiences of curriculum reform are changing over time. During the first year of the evaluation primary school learners were in Year 5 and secondary learners in Year 8. Primary school learners will be in secondary school by the third round of research visits, providing an opportunity to collect insights into the transition from primary to secondary education. Secondary school learners will be in Year 9 for the second and Year 10 for the third round of research visits. Guidance on selecting a sample of learners was provided to schools to ensure that the cross-section of learners provided a rounded view of curriculum experience in the relevant year group/school.

3.8. All ten schools were also given the opportunity to nominate a current practitioner from their school to work alongside the research team to complete a focused research task, exploring a specific aspect of curriculum enactment in their school. This was intended to provide practitioners with opportunities to engage with the evaluation more directly and to contribute to the evidence base for the evaluation. Following the first round of fieldwork, schools with a practitioner researcher provided further insight into a chosen topic through a review of school documents, feedback from their colleagues and learners and drawing on their own perspective.

3.9. This synthesis has drawn on notes compiled by the evaluation team following each round of fieldwork in the ten curriculum journeys schools, along with documentation and feedback presented by six practitioners from these schools following their research activity.

Preparation of the dataset for the synthesis

3.10. The source material for the synthesis was the six evaluation reports published in 2025 and referenced in section 3.4 above as well as findings from the curriculum journeys research completed with 10 schools during 2024 and 2025. Preparation of the synthesis dataset (the research material and reports indicated above) involved the following:

- Creating edited versions of each report and data collected (in the case of curriculum journeys material), to ensure the scope of text analyses was bound

to material referring to findings only. This involved the removal of methods sections, context and introduction sections, references, tools/appendices, sections in the survey reports that indicated what respondents were asked and any notes not pertaining to findings from participant data.

- Survey reports were split into material pertaining to five individual respondent types – parents/carers, learners, teachers, leaders, and the material on connections between variables in the structural equation modelling sections. This ensured that the analytic approach using NVivo allowed separate consideration of data from different respondent types.

Analysis – search and deductive coding plan

3.11. Initial search terms were developed for each of the practices (curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment), using stemmed word options as indicated below (by * at end of word stems).[Footnote 4] These were:

- for curriculum design (curricul* or design or plan or unit or sequence)
- for pedagogy (pedagog* or teach* or activit* or approach or resource*)
- for assessment (assess* or 'progression steps or 'principles of progression' or 'progression principles' or AfL or 'assessment for learning')

3.12. Search terms for potential enablers and constraints were developed based on items (that is, individual activities, outputs and outcomes) included in the theory of change, adapting language to reflect terminology used in research tools and in data collected. These were:

- for human capital (terms relating to wellbeing or satisfaction or commitment or confidence or capability or problem-solving or efficacy)
- for social capital (terms relating to relationships, trust, collaboration, shared understandings and agency)
- for schools as learning organisations (terms relating to learning – including separate searches for 'continuous learning' and 'professional learning'- system, leadership, vision, professional development, team, culture, innovation, exploration, exchange and growth)

[4] Deductive coding is an approach where codes are pre-defined before analysis, based on a theory or existing framework. Inductive coding, in contrast, involves identifying and developing codes and themes from the data as they emerge during the process of reviewing the data.

3.13. Initial search terms for indications of causal links (to focus analysis on enablers and constraints) included the terms ‘cause’, ‘lead’, ‘means that’, ‘result’, ‘because’ or ‘due to’. Deductive categories were established and applied to the analysis of each of the three practices (curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment). Those categories were focused on the following:

- Actions - What is happening?
- Enablers - What is supporting practices/actions?
- Constraints – What is constraining practice/actions?

3.14. An NVivo project was set up with the deductive codes above, and with the prepared source material entered as files for coding.

Systematic synthesis analysis and inductive codes/themes

3.15. All sources were systematically searched using the search terms indicated above, using the following approach: searches were conducted using key words (and word stems), results were saved, and typically a review of the ‘broad coding context’ NVivo tool was applied to ensure relevance of the identified material to each category.

3.16. The sections of text surfaced through that approach were then allocated to inductive codes/themes that reflected the meaning of each. For example, the search using the pedagogical practice terms, identified chunks of text about pedagogical approaches that involved practice that:

- was responsive
- was differentiated
- used mixed ability grouping
- was focused on relevance
- was variable according to context
- in some cases, involved a substantial change to previous approaches

3.17. The codes/themes were subsequently reviewed and refined. So to illustrate, the pedagogical practice coding was further organised in terms of more positive and negative accounts, and similar or related codes grouped together.

Second round deductive coding

3.18. In order to capture related findings that had not emerged during the initial rounds of deductive and inductive coding, an additional step was undertaken: where the

process of inductive coding identified themes, terms related to that same theme were then identified and used as the basis for further searches using these related terms. For example, the support and expertise provided by experts and others emerged as an enabler of practice in the first round of coding, and a subsequent search for 'expert' across all sources identified additional evidence of expertise (for example, expertise external to schools and internal expertise) being an enabler of practice, and a lack expertise, a constraint.

3.19. In addition, deductive coding focused on key elements of the ToC were carried out, searching for key words and synonyms relating to aspects of the ToC assumed to relate to the professional practices.

3.20. Using the analyses described above, a set of key synthesis findings were derived for each practice (curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment) and for findings relating to enablers and constraints.

Reporting

3.21. The findings presented under each chapter are based on the systematic process described above. In order to ensure that the breadth and strength of evidence from across the sources provided an accurate picture of evaluation findings to date, the following steps were taken during the reporting phase:

- identifying the points raised most frequently to enable the sequencing of points within the report according to their prominence in the data
- summarising and/or synthesising evidence from the source reports in ways that were consistent with the original source, and in some cases conveying additional strength or importance of a finding on the basis that it was supported through multiple sources
- referring to proportions (e.g. 'minority', 'majority', 'vast majority') using the same thresholds as used in the original source survey reports.[Footnote 5]

3.22. In the findings of this report, the phrase 'qualitative studies' is used when referring solely to the four qualitative reports published in July 2025. 'Qualitative research' is

[5] In survey reports and in this report, the following descriptors are used to report on the percentage of respondents who provided specific responses to questions: 'vast majority' = 85% or more; 'majority' = between 59% and 84%; 'around half' = between 42% and 58%; 'minority' = between 15% and 41%; 'small minority = 15% or less. It should be noted that these descriptors are not applied to findings that draw on qualitative sources of evidence, where the terms 'most', 'many' or 'some' are used to signify the prevalence of findings or weight of evidence.

used when collectively referring to the four published qualitative studies and evidence from the curriculum journeys research. The term ‘practitioners’ is used when referring collectively to senior leaders, teachers and learning support workers (LSWs).

Limitations

3.23. The qualitative studies and surveys provide a snapshot of practices at a time when the enactment of Curriculum for Wales in schools continued to be an iterative and evolving process, with some schools emphasising that they still felt they were at an early stage in realising the reforms. This limited the ability of the research team to explore schools’ Curriculum for Wales progress over time.

3.24. To minimise participant burden, qualitative discussions with practitioners typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The limitations on time available for discussions restricted opportunities to fully probe participants’ responses on all topics.

3.25. Sample levels in the qualitative studies mean that qualitative findings, while providing rich, in-depth insights into participants’ experiences and perspectives, and the context behind these, are not generalisable to the whole population. These have been synthesised together with survey responses to provide both breadth and depth of evidence.

3.26. While curriculum journeys research included the perspectives of learners, other qualitative studies did not. Learners’ and parents/carers’ views will be further explored through planned qualitative research in the Curriculum for Wales evaluation. The survey of learners did not include those below Reception age (3-4 years old).

3.27. There is a risk of selection bias across the evaluation; schools and parents/carers opting to participate may have been those that were more engaged or, alternatively, those motivated to highlight concerns. The surveys sought to mitigate the risks of selection bias by adopting a stratified quota approach and targeting schools and parents/carers with specific characteristics that were underrepresented in the sample to boost responses from these groups.

4. Curriculum design practices

4.1. This chapter presents findings from the evaluation to date relating to curriculum planning and design. The findings draw on insights derived from the surveys of practitioners, parents/carers and learners; and from qualitative studies and curriculum journeys research.

Substantial changes to schools' curriculum design but variability in perceptions among those in different schools and in different roles

4.2. Substantial changes have been made by schools to various aspects of curriculum planning and design in response to Curriculum for Wales, according to the majority of senior leaders and teachers. Similarly, substantial change to the content and topics used in teaching was reported by the majority of all senior leaders and teachers surveyed.

4.3. All schools that were part of the qualitative research described systematic curriculum design processes leading to substantial changes to their curriculum. Schools frequently referred to the ongoing and time-intensive nature of the iterative curriculum design and planning journey. Schools also noted that their curriculum design was informed by the Curriculum for Wales Framework: curriculum planning was reported to have incorporated the four purposes; curricula were organised in a way that reflected the six Areas of Learning and Experience and in response to the statements of what matters for each Area. Many leaders valued the flexibility to tailor learning to learners' needs, also reflecting Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance. Schools involved in curriculum journeys research reported increased curriculum mapping across Areas; this activity aimed to support clarity and consistency in curriculum planning. This element of the evaluation also found an increased emphasis – particularly in primary schools – on incorporating real-life contexts and on developing transferable skills (team-working, self-evaluation and problem-solving) as part of curriculum planning. Many secondary schools reported moving away from 'teaching to GCSEs', toward developing depth and breadth of knowledge, especially for learners in Years 7-9, sometimes focusing on a narrower range of topics or themes in greater depth than under the previous curriculum.

4.4. It is important to note that, in some cases, primary and secondary schools reported having trialled new approaches but had subsequently reverted to or reintroduced approaches to teaching and learning that were in place prior to the introduction of Curriculum for Wales. Qualitative research into curriculum design found that many secondary schools had reverted to subject-based organisation of their curriculum after trialling a more integrated approach based on Areas. These secondary schools felt that subject specialism better supported learning and was more compatible with qualifications.

4.5. Findings from the survey of senior leaders and teachers showed that perceptions of the extent of curriculum change varied across different roles and school types; for instance, senior leaders were more likely than teachers to agree that there had been substantial changes to the content, topics, and themes being taught. In addition, fewer respondents from secondary schools (compared to primary, special and PRU), and from Welsh-medium schools (compared to English-medium) agreed there had been substantial changes to the content, topics, and themes being taught. Similarly, the same respondent groups (those from secondary schools and Welsh-medium schools) reported fewer changes to curriculum design approaches and were also less likely to agree that curriculum design approaches were robust.

Some learner-influenced curriculum design, but limitations in approaches to learner engagement

4.6. While schools reported that they were involving learners in curriculum design, this remained relatively limited in scope and nature. Schools and settings in each of the qualitative studies reported approaches to using learner voice and preferences to inform curriculum design. Practitioners involved in the qualitative study that focused on curriculum and assessment design described their approaches to curriculum design as being a learner-influenced or practitioner-mediated approach, rather than learner-led. Practitioners who contributed to qualitative studies and curriculum journeys research referred to the challenge and complexity of incorporating learners' diverse interests into curriculum plans, voicing some concerns about prioritising learner-directed topics over literacy and numeracy.

4.7. Learners expressed mixed views about the extent to which they were able to influence their school curriculum. Survey data revealed that around half of learners (Reception–Year 9) agreed that their teachers listen to them (58%) or that they can tell teachers if they like what they are learning about (50%). A minority of Year 3-9

learners agreed that teachers ask what they would like to learn about (41%) or how they would like to learn (33%).[Footnote 6] Primary school learners were more likely than those in secondary schools to indicate they had been involved in various aspects of curriculum design. Non-disabled learners were more likely to indicate they had been involved in various aspects of curriculum design compared to disabled learners.

4.8. Consistent with findings from the survey of learners, learners involved in the curriculum journeys fieldwork expressed varying perceptions of their influence on their learning. While some learners described opportunities to choose between tasks or activities – such as selecting a problem to solve or choosing between different types of task to complete – many felt they had limited input into the actual content of lessons. Despite these constraints, learners valued having a say and believed it helped boost motivation and engagement.

4.9. Overall learners involved in curriculum journeys felt that the curriculum they experienced did provide opportunities to learn about things that mattered to them from the world outside school. Across both primary and secondary settings, learners appreciated learning a wide range of topics, especially those with real-world applications. Projects focused on topics such as electronics and cultural appreciation were highlighted as meaningful, with learners emphasising the importance of learning that helps them understand and navigate the world beyond the classroom.

Limited parent and community engagement in curriculum design, but pockets of success to learn from

4.10. While the majority of parent survey respondents (66%) reported they had been involved in curriculum design by hearing from their school how they can support their child's learning, far fewer reported involvement in curriculum design by sharing their ideas (40%), contributing their experience/expertise to support teaching and learning (41%) or by giving feedback on the curriculum (38%). Overall, less than half (41%) agreed that they feel listened to through their schools' approach to involving them in curriculum discussions.

4.11. Parents' and carers' desire for more information about what was being taught was one of the most frequently raised themes in responses to open-text survey questions.

4.12. Patterns of parents' reports of involvement in curriculum design also varied according to school and learner characteristics – parents of disabled learners were less likely

[6] Reception-Year 2 learners were not asked this question.

than parents of non-disabled learners to report having opportunities to be involved in most activities related to curriculum design.

4.13. Many practitioners involved in qualitative studies reported that they consulted with parents and carers in designing their curriculum, typically through parent surveys. This engagement activity was reported to have been used to inform curriculum plans, at times identifying topics to explore linked to Areas of the curriculum. These broadly positive perspectives provided by practitioners do not appear entirely consistent with parent and carer survey data, which indicated that many parents did not feel they were able to influence curriculum design through their involvement and feedback. This should be considered alongside some of the parent/carer survey findings which suggest that increasing collaboration without also fostering agency among parents appears to be negatively related to levels of trust and perceptions of progress towards curriculum aspirations.

4.14. Many practitioners in schools and settings reported valuing insights from parents and carers to help create a curriculum that meets learners' individual needs. Despite this, some practitioners who contributed to qualitative studies and curriculum journeys research also noted difficulties they had faced in engaging with parents. In some cases, senior leaders reported that engaging with parents was challenging due to a perceived lack of understanding of Curriculum for Wales, with expectations rooted in a more familiar content or product-oriented curriculum model focused on grades and summative assessment outcomes; in a few other cases, practitioners working in EOTAS settings observed that parents' own negative past experiences of education appeared to act as a barrier to engagement.

An emphasis on collaboration in curriculum design

4.15. Collaboration was reported to have been central to schools’ approaches to curriculum design, mostly including collaboration between teachers within schools and, to a lesser extent, through school-to-school activity to support curriculum design. For example, the vast majority of teachers indicated that, in designing the curriculum at their school, there had been collaboration between teachers (92%), and the majority indicated collaboration with learners (80%), primary schools (72%) and governors (64%). Fewer teachers, around half, indicated there had been collaboration with parents or carers (58%) and secondary schools (57%).

4.16. Across all sources of data, key areas of focus of collaborative activity to support curriculum design were reported to be whole-school approaches, including whole-school planning; identifying curriculum priorities; setting themes, topics and concepts to be explored through curriculum enactment; areas for professional enquiries; approaches to support emotional and mental well-being; and evidence-informed approaches.

4.17. Qualitative research also found that collaboration – both in-school and external (school-to-school) collaboration – was widely recognised as an important factor in supporting curriculum design and enactment. Such collaboration helped foster engagement and trust among staff, which was deemed crucial in supporting curriculum enactment. Qualitative research found examples of more deliberate and purposeful internal collaboration being reported in schools. Practitioners also reported additional joint-planning activity to allow teachers to reflect on their curriculum plans and share learning, aimed at supporting coherence in curriculum design and enactment within individual schools.

4.18. External collaboration was reported to take several forms, including engagement with school clusters, participation in formal federations, and involvement in regional or local authority networks. Participants emphasised the importance of this collaboration, noting that joint-working with other schools was supporting schools' capacity to engage in curriculum-making, enabling the sharing of resources and ideas that schools could adapt to their individual contexts, and that it also encouraged professional dialogue and shared practice. Among the schools that contributed to curriculum journeys research, collaboration was reported to have strengthened under the new curriculum arrangements, characterised by a move from ad-hoc engagement to more structured and purposeful collaborative planning. This included cluster-based collaboration and curriculum mapping involving primary and secondary schools to coordinate and reach agreement on aspects of curriculum planning. This was reported to have supported a shared understanding of curriculum planning for Years 6 and 7, helping to clarify expectations for incoming Year 7 learners across different Areas and subjects.

Practices that support rigorous curriculum design

4.19. The majority of senior leaders and around half of teachers surveyed indicated that the approach in their school had involved a number of practices that are widely

recognised as supporting rigour in curriculum design. These were: learning from professional enquiry (60% of senior leaders and 44% teachers reported “quite a bit” or “a great deal” of involvement), using educational research (63% senior leaders, 41% teachers) or sharing evidence and expertise across local or cluster networks (65% senior leaders, 49% of teachers). This indicates that activities supporting rigour in curriculum design are consistently carried out by a higher proportion of senior leaders than teachers.

4.20. There was variability in the spread of such curriculum design practices reported by senior leaders, with some sub-groups more likely to indicate that curriculum design at their school had involved these practices, namely those with specific curriculum leadership responsibility, more experienced practitioners, and those teaching in schools with a lower percentage of learners eligible for free school meals. These practices were also reported by a higher proportion of senior leaders in English-medium schools (compared to those in Welsh-medium schools). Among teachers, those in primary schools were more likely than those in secondary schools to report involvement in professional enquiry and the sharing evidence and expertise across local or cluster networks to support curriculum design. Those with under 3 years of experience were more likely than those with 11-30 years’ experience to report involvement in these curriculum design practices; and those in schools with a lower percentage of learners with ALN were also more likely to have reported being involved in such activity.

Purposes at the centre of curriculum design

4.21. The majority of senior leaders and teachers surveyed reported that there was a shared understanding within their schools of how their school’s curriculum supported their learners to develop in the ways described by the four purposes (84% of senior leaders and 73% of teachers). In open-text responses to the survey, some senior leaders and teachers indicated that they valued working towards the four purposes and the focus within the Curriculum for Wales Framework on making connections between and across subjects and Areas.

4.22. A number of the schools that participated in the qualitative studies reported that the four purposes underpinned much of their curriculum realisation. These schools noted that this had led to a greater focus during discussions about curriculum planning and pedagogical approaches on the purposes of learning, with practitioners reflecting on

why and *how* particular aspects of the curriculum were being taught. Some senior leaders and teachers reported that discussion around the purposes of the curriculum sometimes involved drawing on input from learners (more often in primary than in secondary contexts).

4.23. Research with curriculum journeys schools echoed findings from qualitative studies, revealing consistently that the four purposes had been embraced by schools. Curriculum journeys schools reported using the four purposes and other elements of the Framework (notably the statements of what matters) to guide approaches when organising and revising their curriculum themes, projects and enquiry questions. To support curriculum design, schools undertook in-school collaboration across phases to embed the four purposes, sometimes dedicating time to focus on the characteristics of each purpose to help teachers interpret them and support learner understanding of their importance.

School structures and roles established to support curriculum design

4.24. Although the Curriculum for Wales Framework does not require schools to make changes to staffing structures, evidence from qualitative studies demonstrated that some schools undertook reorganisation of staff and management arrangements to support curriculum realisation. This reorganisation sometimes involved the creation of Area leads who were explicitly tasked with responsibility for leading on curriculum design within their specific Areas. Schools reported having introduced leadership roles and staffing structures to align with the curriculum's requirements.

4.25. In secondary schools the organisation of roles tended to reflect existing subject specialisms. In some cases, this was a decision that schools had made early in their curriculum planning and design. In other cases (as noted earlier in section 4.4), schools had trialled or considered introducing an interdisciplinary approach to staffing structures and content before reverting to previous subject-based or faculty-based arrangements.

4.26. These varying approaches illustrate that the Framework provides flexibility that allows schools to take a range of approaches to their internal organisation to support curriculum design while pursuing the purposes of Curriculum for Wales.

Integrative approaches to curriculum design

4.27. Approaches to curriculum design described by participants in the qualitative studies referred to integrative approaches of three types – 1) approaches that integrate curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment; 2) approaches that integrate subjects, disciplines or Areas; and 3) approaches that integrate elements of the Curriculum for Wales Framework including for example the four purposes and the six Areas, statements of what matters, cross-cutting themes, cross-curricular skills and the pedagogical principles.

4.28. Related to this, there was evidence of integrative approaches being taken to the design and delivery of specific Areas. The qualitative study on Health and Well-being showed that the inclusion of the Health and Well-being Area had enabled schools to adopt a holistic approach to well-being, covering physical, mental, emotional, and social development. Practitioners reported that this had enhanced the status of well-being within the curriculum, sometimes leading to increased time allocation for this Area. All schools in the qualitative study explicitly focused on supporting learners' social and emotional skills like confidence and resilience. Practitioners working in EOTAS provision reported that health and well-being was often at the centre of their teaching and learning

4.29. Learners involved in curriculum journeys research were asked whether the curriculum helps them see how different subjects are connected. There were mixed responses, with primary school learners generally referring more frequently than secondary learners to examples of the connections between subjects at school. Primary school learners provided examples of how different projects or topics had integrated numeracy tasks alongside history and geography. Learners in secondary schools noted that some subject connections were more obvious to them than others and that teachers occasionally made links to things they were studying in other Areas of the curriculum. Learners in Year 9 felt that, as they progressed through school years, there were fewer cross-subject connections as they spent time looking in greater depth into specific subjects.

4.30. These mixed views were reflected in secondary learners’ survey responses. A minority of Year 7 to 9 learners surveyed (31%) reported that they could see the connections between the different subjects they were learning about at school, with around half (45%) disagreeing with this.

4.31. Meanwhile, the vast majority of senior leaders and a majority of teachers expressed confidence in being able to support learners to make connections between subjects and areas of learning and experience. The vast majority of senior leaders and a majority of teachers also felt that their teaching practice encouraged learners to make connections within and across areas of learning.

Emphasis on breadth in curriculum design

4.32. A number of the schools that contributed to qualitative research referred to ways in which their approaches to curriculum design sought to provide a broad and balanced education and a holistic learning experience, reflecting the aspirations of the Curriculum for Wales Framework:

- **a focus on social and emotional skills:** some schools underlined the importance of supporting learners' social and emotional skills and providing opportunities for them to develop confidence and resilience. The enactment of the Health and Well-being Area supports a holistic approach to supporting learner progress, incorporating physical health, mental health, emotional, and social well-being.
- **a focus on cross-curricular skills and skills integral to the four purposes:** in other cases schools focused on integral skills (creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, personal effectiveness, and planning/organising) and mandatory cross-curricular skills (literacy, numeracy, and digital competence) in their curriculum design. These elements were frequently used as organising structures. These schools underlined the development of leadership and empathy as important lifelong skills for learners, which form part of the integral skills included in the Framework.
- **a focus on the local context and effective environments:** curriculum design frequently incorporated the local environment and local context, drawing on current affairs and community links to ensure relevance for learners and enabling the development of locally responsive curricula focused on learner needs. Many senior leaders and schools reported that they place an emphasis on their school's local community, or on sense of place (sometimes referring to the concept of *cynefin*) as part of their curriculum design to promote a sense of belonging among learners; this also reflects a

key enabler for planning and designing a pedagogically appropriate inclusive curriculum set out in the Enabling Learning guidance.

5. Pedagogical practices

5.1. This chapter presents findings from the evaluation to date relating to pedagogical practices. The findings draw on insights derived from the surveys of practitioners, parents/carers and learners, and from qualitative studies and curriculum journeys research.

Confidence that pedagogical practices reflect the Curriculum for Wales Framework

5.2. Many senior leaders and teachers reported reasonably high levels of confidence that pedagogical practices in their schools reflect key aspects of the Curriculum for Wales Framework. Around two-thirds to three-quarters of respondents agreed they were confident that their pedagogical practice, or that of teachers at their school, reflected the four purposes, the statements of what matters, the 12 pedagogical principles and the principles of progression.

5.3. A large majority of senior leaders and teachers also agreed that teaching practices at their school reflected the cross-curricular skills of literacy, numeracy and digital competence and the skills integral to the four purposes.

5.4. A consistently higher proportion of senior leaders, compared with teachers, agreed that their pedagogical practice, or that of teachers at their school, aligned with the Curriculum for Wales Framework. This was consistent with the general pattern observed in the survey data, where more positive views were expressed by senior leaders compared with teachers.

Substantial changes to pedagogical practice in response to Curriculum for Wales, though with much variability across the system

5.5. The majority of teachers surveyed reported making substantial changes to pedagogical practices, including to the content or topics/themes of their teaching; the teaching or learning activities they use; the teaching or learning approaches they use; how they meet the needs of each individual learner to enable them to make progress at an appropriate pace; and their planning. Around half of teachers agreed they had made changes to the resources used in their teaching.

5.6. All schools that contributed to qualitative research reported they had made changes, and most reported making substantial changes to pedagogical practices, stimulated

by their efforts to realise Curriculum for Wales. Many schools actively used the pedagogical principles outlined in the Framework to inform their teaching, leading to movement towards learner-centred approaches. These changes were reported to have positive consequences: practitioners reported enhanced professional satisfaction and agency and that these approaches enabled them to be more inclusive. They also observed that learners demonstrated increased engagement, self-awareness, enthusiasm, and ownership of their learning and progress.

5.7. Learners involved in curriculum journeys research were not asked specific questions about changes to pedagogy, however most agreed that teachers in their school 'encouraged them to work hard'; learners also commented on actions taken by teachers to promote greater independence in their learning. Learners in a number of primary schools noted that they were given opportunities to select a level of difficulty for various tasks, progressing to more challenging tasks or questions over time. This was perceived to be fair as it enabled learners to have a say in the work they completed, ensuring that learners were not left behind. Learners in primary and secondary schools noted that they were discouraged from asking for help from teachers too soon, instead being prompted to try again individually, and also to discuss matters with their peers, before approaching the teacher.

5.8. Despite adaptations to practice, there remains variability across the system in the nature and extent of pedagogical change, influenced by differing interpretations of the aims of Curriculum for Wales. This variability is pronounced between educational phases: primary schools generally reported having adopted more holistic and interdisciplinary approaches; while secondary schools also reported changes to practice, there was less evidence of widescale change. In some cases, changes to staffing structures were also found to have contributed to divergent approaches to teaching and learning. Qualitative studies found that some secondary schools reorganised staffing arrangements based on subject specialisms, which were not always conducive to a more interdisciplinary approach to curriculum realisation seen in some schools and promoted in the Framework. Furthermore, external pressures - such as concerns about maintaining attainment, school performance measures and school inspections - led schools to make fewer changes to teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy compared with other areas of the curriculum, often retaining existing pedagogical and assessment methods for subjects such as English and Maths.

Responsiveness to learner needs and interests through pedagogical practices

5.9. Practitioners who contributed to qualitative research frequently referred to the importance of adopting pedagogical practice that is responsive to the different needs and interests of learners. They emphasised the importance of frequent review and self-evaluation to support ongoing improvement not only to curriculum design, but also during the enactment of their curriculum plans to ensure their pedagogical practices were meeting learners' needs.

5.10. Schools involved in qualitative research reported that they were utilising differentiated pedagogy and strategies in response to individual learner needs. This included setting out intended learning outcomes (at times referred to as learning objectives), success criteria, support and teaching and learning approaches. In practice, this involved working with smaller groups, and providing more bespoke one-to-one support. A number of schools referred to steps they had taken to trial and embed mixed attainment grouping, which some reported had helped foster a more inclusive learning environment. Others noted that the transition to mixed-ability grouping had been difficult for some practitioners who were more familiar with tiered classes and also that in some cases parents had preferred previous arrangements where learners were grouped by ability.

5.11. The qualitative study focused on equity and inclusion found that all schools involved in that particular research had made changes to incorporate and reflect learners' needs as part of their curriculum, supporting equity and inclusion. These schools frequently reported a greater focus on identifying learner needs to inform differentiated pedagogies and targeted support, underlining a commitment to ensuring equity in how learners experience the curriculum. The qualitative study on equity and inclusion noted that some schools reported that planning and realising the curriculum in a way that accommodated diverse needs was contributing to benefits in terms of learners' engagement.

5.12. In some schools engaged during the qualitative research, practices such as adopting relational pedagogies and trauma-informed approaches in the Health and Well-being Area were considered important ways of responding to learners' needs and backgrounds, while also supporting the whole school approach to emotional and mental well-being.

A focus on pedagogical practices that provide relevant, authentic and engaging experiences for learners

5.13. Practitioners have devoted considerable attention to developing pedagogical approaches that help establish and maintain learner engagement. Practitioners from across various settings taking part in the qualitative studies described their efforts to ensure engagement through a focus on experiences that are relevant and interesting, and on designing teaching and learning experiences that are stimulating, authentic and purposeful. The vast majority of teaching senior leaders (92%) and the majority of teachers (82%) agreed that they were confident in their ability to provide authentic and purposeful experiences for learners.

5.14. Many qualitative study participants reported that they had adopted learner enquiry and research approaches or increased their emphasis on such pedagogical approaches. Some used this as a means of: integrating learners' interests and personal lived experiences into the curriculum they experienced, promoting equity and inclusion and supporting the development of skills (including critical thinking) and knowledge across the curriculum.

Emergence of teachers as facilitators, encouraging increased learner responsibility

5.15. Some primary and secondary qualitative study participants described an evolving emphasis in pedagogical approaches that incorporated practitioner-led or direct teaching alongside a growing focus on what was variously described as 'teacher as facilitator' or learner-centred approaches. This reflects the Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance that refers to 'employing a blend of approaches including direct teaching'.

5.16. Some practitioners described this change as a move from learners experiencing a *taught curriculum* (with a focus on the acquisition of content) to *learnt curriculum*, where the teacher facilitates or guides learning with an increased focus on enquiry, experiential, and authentic learning. Revisiting pedagogical approaches was also reported to have helped senior leaders and teachers to engage in discussions about the fundamental 'purpose' of teaching and learning, prompting reflections on why specific content was being delivered.

5.17. Senior leaders and teachers observed that this perceived shift to teachers as facilitators encouraged learners to take increased responsibility for their learning, and

to have greater agency. In practice, learners were supported to reflect on their progress relative to a particular skill and choose appropriate levels of challenge, taking greater ownership of their learning and their individual progress.

6. Assessment practices

6.1. This chapter presents findings from the evaluation to date relating to assessment practices. The findings draw on insights derived from the surveys of senior leaders and teachers, parents/carers and learners, and from qualitative studies and curriculum journeys research.

Substantial changes to assessment approaches and focus, though with variable accounts provided by senior leaders and teachers

6.2. There have been substantial changes to assessment approaches and the focus of assessment, according to the majority of senior leaders surveyed as part of the evaluation; this was reported by a notably lower proportion of teachers (around half). The majority of senior leaders and teachers agreed that here have been substantial changes by teachers to meet the needs of each individual learner to enable them to make progress at an appropriate pace.

6.3. Practitioners involved in qualitative research during the evaluation described a range of changes to assessment practice. The examples most frequently provided related to: devising new assessment models; exploring different assessment practices, informed by Curriculum for Wales; considering priorities for what is important in learning and the implications for assessment.

6.4. While changes to assessment models and processes have taken place, practitioners recognised the need to continue to review and refine curriculum and assessment arrangements.

Varying accounts of changes to assessment according to those in different contexts and roles

6.5. Senior leaders and teachers in secondary schools, more frequently than those in primary schools, reported that they had experienced challenges in developing assessment practices under the new arrangements. Developing assessment arrangements that both reflected the ethos of Curriculum for Wales and were suited to secondary school contexts was reported to have involved considerable time, particularly in discussing and interpreting the progression steps and descriptions of learning. Schools identified particular challenges in assessing and understanding learner progress in relation to the Health and Wellbeing Area.

6.6. The timing of GCSE specification releases was also reported to have presented challenges, requiring secondary schools to rethink approaches to teaching and learning after initial curriculum design for Years 7-9. Evidence collected through qualitative studies to date indicates that a tension exists in secondary schools between adopting holistic, learner-centred methods and the need to prepare learners for externally assessed qualifications.

A shift towards formative and individualised assessment

6.7. Across schools and settings, senior leaders and teachers explained that changes to assessment practice had involved a pronounced shift from summative and attainment-focused assessment towards more formative and individualised approaches. In some cases, this reflected an acknowledgement among practitioners of the different purposes of assessment, with schools using assessment for formative and summative purposes as appropriate.

6.8. Assessment approaches reported by schools and settings frequently took a 'whole child' view of learners, aiming to recognise their individual characteristics, starting points and broader progress, looking beyond age-based or fixed attainment targets. Schools and settings considered that the introduction of Curriculum for Wales supported a positive shift towards more holistic approaches to assessment for all learners, particularly senior leaders and teachers in primary schools and in EOTAS provision, where more tailored assessment practices were considered to better meet diverse learner needs.

6.9. All schools involved in the equity and inclusion qualitative study reported that the Curriculum for Wales Framework had provided them with the opportunity to develop a curriculum tailored to the needs of their learners and communities. Most schools noted that they had made changes to how they assessed learner progress, including renewed impetus for identifying and supporting individual needs.

An emphasis on Assessment for Learning (AfL) principles and a focus on assessment for progression

6.10. The vast majority of leaders and teachers surveyed reported that their own assessment practices build on learners' prior knowledge and experience and use Assessment for Learning principles. Assessment practices reported by senior leaders and teachers reflect the principles of progression: the majority of senior leaders and

teachers reported that they were confident that assessment practice supported the progression of each individual learner, provided meaningful and constructive feedback, and that assessment was embedded within teaching and learning.

6.11. Most participants involved in the qualitative studies also emphasised that their practice increasingly involved using formative approaches to assessment. In particular, they described:

- Re-visiting Assessment for Learning principles: while such approaches had been previously embedded in a wide range of schools and settings, these were reported to have received increased attention as part of the enactment of Curriculum for Wales
- Focusing on 'assessment for progression', moving from levels and outcomes to a focus on developing learners' skills and knowledge
- Beginning with what learners know, and using personalised, in-depth questioning and learner progression profiles to gain insights into how individual learners were progressing
- Supporting learner self-awareness and engagement with their educational journey through the shift towards more formative approaches.

Increased use of self- and peer-assessment

6.12. Practitioners and learners who contributed to qualitative research reported that learners were increasingly involved in assessment through the introduction of, or renewed emphasis on, peer- and self-assessment. They reported that peer-assessment and self-assessment helped foster greater learner ownership and understanding of their progress. Learners were encouraged to participate in setting intended outcomes or targets as well as self-assessment, helping to build confidence and independence which are aspects of the skills integral to the four purposes.

Learners' mixed views on understanding their progress

6.13. Changes to assessment have placed a greater focus on identifying and supporting individual learner needs; most schools have adopted a more holistic view of assessment, aiming to recognise individual characteristics, which was perceived by senior leaders and teachers to be benefitting learner progression.

6.14. Learners reported feeling informed about their progress – the majority of learners surveyed agreed that teachers help them understand when they are making progress

in their learning. Primary school learners surveyed reported more positive views about how teachers helped them understand their progress than learners in secondary schools.

6.15. Evidence from qualitative research with learners as part of the curriculum journeys fieldwork largely reflected survey data, revealing that, overall, learners felt they knew when they were making progress. At times, however, feedback provided on tasks and assessments was felt to be unclear or confusing.

6.16. Learners provided examples of ongoing feedback or assessment methods used in their schools to help them understand how they had progressed or what they needed to do to build on their learning. This often involved setting learning goals or success criteria for subjects or tasks, with assessment or self-assessment focused on understanding progress towards these objectives. Learners in some schools reported that teachers would encourage them to improve their work by highlighting positive aspects but also identifying how work could be improved further.

6.17. Some learners felt that at times they did not receive helpful or constructive feedback. Learners in secondary schools, in particular, explained that approaches to providing feedback differed between subjects and teachers. Termly or annual written reports were also felt by learners to be an important way to understand progress. Some participants in these discussions felt that the nature of the feedback provided (particularly where labels such as ‘developing’ were used to describe progress) led to them feeling demotivated or demoralised about their progress.

Variability in the extent of change to assessment and alignment with the Curriculum for Wales Framework

6.18. In some contexts, schools and settings continued to use assessment approaches – such as the use of generic level descriptors – that were perceived to ‘work’, but which were not well aligned with the aspirations of Curriculum for Wales. Where this was the case, schools explained that they felt confident to use these approaches because they had agency under the curriculum and assessment reforms to decide on approaches that they considered were most appropriate for their learners.

6.19. Some senior leaders and teachers commented further on the perceived vagueness of the guidance on assessment and progression.

7. Enablers and constraints in realising Curriculum for Wales

7.1. Evidence from the formative evaluation to date reveals accounts of a number of enablers and constraints that impact the extent to which practitioners can enact Curriculum for Wales through their practice.

7.2. Leadership, professional learning, professional enquiry, collaboration, and curriculum design capability were extremely prominent in the accounts provided by participants about what has been supporting or enabling their curriculum realisation to date.

7.3. Evidence regarding the barriers to curriculum enactment featured strongly in data collected. Participants identified a number of aspects that served as constraints to curriculum enactment. Most prominent among these were a lack of specific and timely guidance, a lack of access to high quality professional learning, the extent of collaboration and a lack of time and capacity necessary to realise the possibilities and ambitions afforded by the Curriculum for Wales Framework.

7.4. Understandably, many of the enablers and constraints shared a common focus: high levels and/or quality of collaboration, professional learning, curriculum design capability and guidance/tools, for example, enabled good practice; conversely, the absence of these was reported to constrain practitioners' and senior leaders' efforts.

7.5. In the following sections, findings about enablers and constraints that draw from a synthesis of insights from across all sources - qualitative research and survey findings - are presented first. At the end of each section results from the survey specifically related to each enabler/constraint are presented to give an indication of how widespread practice is relating to each enabler and/or levels of practitioner confidence in relevant practice.

Leadership

7.6. Senior leaders' understanding and confidence in leading the reforms were identified by qualitative research participants as critical components in supporting realisation. Participants referred to the important role of leaders who deliberately fostered an inclusive, supportive environment, a shared vision, practitioner agency and enquiry-based approaches to curriculum practice. Curriculum journeys research underlined the importance of leadership as an enabler, influencing the extent of changes and establishing a culture of engagement and trust necessary to support curriculum

enactment. Effective leadership was perceived to be a key enabler in a number of ways, including:

- initiating and driving change in ways that were strategic and secured staff buy-in
- ensuring coherence in curriculum design, coordinating discussions with Area leads to co-construct curriculum plans
- organising and overseeing distributed leadership models, giving staff ownership of aspects of curriculum planning and monitoring
- developing teacher capability, recognising which areas required further professional learning and delivering or ensuring access to support
- managing time, ensuring there was capacity for relevant teachers to focus on curriculum planning and evaluation when necessary

7.7. It is important to note that accounts were provided of not only purposeful *leadership* in broad terms, but effective *curriculum and pedagogical leadership* in particular; new approaches to curriculum realisation and the associated pedagogies and assessment approaches were reported to be contingent on the effectiveness of *curriculum leadership* specifically.

7.8. Qualitative research participants reported that the dependence on individual leadership capability among senior leaders in schools has meant that variability has arisen across the system, contributing to inconsistencies in the quality of curriculum realisation.

7.9. For most aspects of curriculum leadership efficacy, the majority of senior leaders expressed confidence in their ability as a leader. Senior leaders were most confident about their ability to support others to develop their teaching and learning. The ability to connect people to collaborate on curriculum and assessment design was the aspect of curriculum leadership in which senior leaders expressed least confidence in their ability. Senior leaders' confidence in aspects of curriculum leadership efficacy varied according to the level of experience and the school context in which respondents worked.

7.10. In response to the survey, a minority of senior leaders (26%) agreed that there is quality leadership across the education system to support Curriculum for Wales.[Footnote 7]

[7] An information note was provided for this option noting "the 'education system' refers to the role of Welsh Government, local authorities, regional consortia / partnerships, Estyn and other stakeholders in supporting schools".

Professional learning

7.11. Professional learning was seen as a key enabler of design, pedagogy and assessment practices, given the complexity of curriculum and the extent of changes to practice required by Curriculum for Wales. Practitioners noted the importance of schools accessing support from both external experts (for example, professional learning and advice from curriculum experts from outside the school) and in-school support from practitioners.

7.12. Practitioners reported that curriculum realisation was constrained by a lack of time and financial resources, particularly the funding required to release staff for professional learning. These shortages were also reported by practitioners to have exacerbated existing workload pressures and limited the dedicated time available for planning and collaboration.

7.13. Evidence from across all sources reveals that professional learning that builds curriculum capability is considered important by practitioners. Qualitative research participants described this as professional learning that helps to develop practitioners' commitment, knowledge about, and understanding and skills for designing, teaching and assessing in ways that are consistent with the curriculum aspirations. Some senior leaders emphasised the importance of professional learning that focuses on developing practitioners' efficacy in *leading* curriculum change and improvement – building their confidence to work with others in ways that build collective capability.

7.14. A majority of middle leaders, teachers, LSWs and other school staff responding to the survey indicated that they have access to high quality professional learning (60%). Around half (57%) agreed that the professional learning they had been involved in was high quality. A similar proportion of senior leaders and teachers reported that they have access to high-quality professional learning (both 59%). Around half (51%) of middle leaders, teachers, LSWs and other school staff indicated they have been involved in enough professional learning to meet their needs. This was lower than the proportion of headteachers and senior leaders who answered this question (62%).

Collaboration

7.15. Collaboration between practitioners as part of formal professional learning initiatives was considered important in supporting practitioners' efforts, including through

clusters and networks. Practitioners considered that these collaborations enabled the sharing of expertise, building practitioners' confidence to trial new ideas and approaches. Qualitative research found that collaboration (in-school collaboration and school-to-school working) influenced schools' approaches to curriculum realisation and adaptations to pedagogy.

7.16. Collaboration also occurred outside of formal professional learning initiatives in collaborative activity within schools, often in relation to curriculum design and planning. Networks (for instance, clusters and federations) were considered to be highly beneficial for sharing resources and knowledge, providing a more informal space for discussion, and providing direction where this may be lacking.

7.17. Survey findings indicated that the vast majority of teachers (92%) and senior leaders (98%) agreeing that there has been collaboration between teachers on curriculum design.

Professional enquiry

7.18. Where professional enquiry was happening, it was reported to serve as an important enabler through which schools cultivated an open, questioning culture that supported continuous learning and innovation in curriculum design and enactment. Some schools systematically embedded professional enquiry, through research or action learning activity in groups, utilising this process to investigate the suitability of pedagogy and assessment specifically for their contexts and learners. Conversely, some practitioners felt constrained by the focus on professional enquiry, arguing that without a clearer pathway or prior curriculum design expertise, they needed more basic guidance rather than complex research-based models.

7.19. Overall, however, professional enquiry practices were not particularly widespread – survey results show that 44% of teachers reported that curriculum design at their school involved quite a bit or a great deal of learning from professional enquiry, and 41% were using educational research as part of their approach to curriculum design. Senior leaders were more likely than teachers to report that curriculum design at their school involved learning from professional enquiry (60%) and using educational research (63%). However, overall the evidence does not collectively suggest widespread professional enquiry or research engagement.

Curriculum design capability

7.20. An important assumption that underpins the realisation of Curriculum for Wales is that senior leaders and teachers have the capability to co-construct a curriculum that meets the needs of their learners. While practitioners generally felt confident in their existing pedagogical knowledge, many lacked prior expertise specifically in curriculum design, resulting in divergent approaches within and across settings - such as adopting approaches to curriculum planning that were not always consistent with the process model curriculum that underpins the Curriculum for Wales Framework. Curriculum design capability was strengthened where leaders established specific roles, such as Area leads, with designated responsibility for coordinating the complex and time-intensive process of curriculum planning and design.

7.21. Overall, however, curriculum design capability was not widespread among teachers – survey results show that just over half (54%) of teachers expressed confidence in their own curriculum design expertise. A considerably higher percentage of senior leaders, compared with teachers, reported being confident in their own curriculum design expertise (73%).

Guidance to support curriculum realisation

7.22. The Curriculum for Wales Framework has been a catalyst for substantial curriculum change across schools by providing the statutory structure (four purposes, Areas of Learning and Experience, cross-cutting themes) necessary for local curriculum design.

7.23. Around half of teachers, middle leaders and LSWs (44%) and of headteachers and senior leaders (49%) agreed that the broader guidance (for example on Hwb), support and resources they had used had met their needs.[Footnote 8] Similarly, around half of senior leaders (56%) and teachers (55%) agreed that guidance, support and resources they had used had met their needs.

7.24. The evaluation found that practitioners had made use of aspects of the Framework to guide and inform curriculum realisation. Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance and other supporting materials provided by the Welsh Government was reported to have enabled practitioners to reshape their teaching towards learner-centred models. The

[8] An information box next to this option noted “This could include the Curriculum for Wales Framework guidance on Hwb or support delivered by regional consortia or local authorities”.

pedagogical principles were cited as an example of guidance that had supported some schools' thinking and planning. However, senior leaders and teachers voiced criticism of other elements of the guidance in survey responses and in qualitative research. Qualitative research and open-text survey responses revealed that guidance to support curriculum design was perceived by practitioners to be insufficient and lacking in clarity. Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance was described as being 'vague', leaving a sense of uncertainty among practitioners when looking to translate curriculum expectations into practical situations. In some cases, schools reported that documentation published to support curriculum realisation was felt to have been produced after schools had designed their curricula. There were calls for both more and better guidance, particularly with regard to assessment, and access to more examples of innovative or interesting practice.

7.25. In the Health and Well-being qualitative study, and curriculum journeys fieldwork Welsh-medium secondary schools reported a lack of necessary Welsh language teaching resources, requiring them to spend additional time preparing or translating materials.

7.26. Schools that contributed to the equity and inclusion qualitative study noted that the Curriculum for Wales Framework had led to an increased focus on these themes and on supporting learners' individual needs. However, there was a general feeling among these schools that the guidance lacked specificity regarding support for particular vulnerable groups. Most schools involved in this study believed that the individualised approaches taken to curriculum realisation were inherently addressing the needs of specific groups, however practitioners noted that they would have benefited from more detailed guidance about how Curriculum for Wales can directly support learners with ALN, learners affected by poverty or those with other protected characteristics.

7.27. Another qualitative study examined how Curriculum for Wales is being realised in EOTAS provision, including PRUs. More than half of non-PRU EOTAS practitioners reported having little contact with their local authority concerning curriculum design and delivery and therefore received minimal guidance in understanding and realising mandatory aspects of the Framework. The study concluded that more support may be needed from local authorities to ensure curricula meet non-PRU EOTAS learners' needs. The study also highlighted that more relevant professional learning would be beneficial for both PRUs and non-PRU EOTAS that specifically addresses the unique contexts and diverse needs of EOTAS learners.

Time and capacity

7.28. Insufficient time, capacity and resources have proved to be a constraint for teachers and senior leaders, with these factors repeatedly highlighted as inhibiting pedagogical innovation and curriculum development. A lack of financial resources was reported to have hampered schools' ability to fund professional learning, provide necessary support staff, and offer certain authentic, experiential learning such as residential trips, thereby impacting equity goals, particularly for schools in areas of higher deprivation.

7.29. Comments from practitioners revealed that, while they supported the vision and aspirations of the curriculum reforms, they felt the vision was difficult to realise in the current climate of budget deficits, the increasing volume of complex learner needs, staff capacity and limited time to support enactment. Senior leaders commented on a lack of funding for support staff, impacting on schools' ability to support curriculum development and provide enriching authentic experiences for learners.

7.30. Survey responses indicated that only a small minority of teachers (10%) and senior leaders (9%) agreed that there is sufficient time allocated to supporting work on Curriculum for Wales. 4% of both teachers and senior leaders agreed that there is sufficient funding allocated to supporting work on Curriculum for Wales.

Teacher agency

7.31. Agency was widely welcomed by practitioners and senior leaders who appreciated the flexibility to design a curriculum that was bespoke and responsive to local context and learner needs. This professional freedom supported the perception of greater creativity and among staff and increased ownership of the curriculum. Conversely, this agency was constrained by the resulting lack of standardisation across the system, which generated anxiety and a fear among some practitioners that their locally-developed curriculum or assessment practices might later be deemed unsuitable or incorrect and forced to change.

8. Emerging outcomes

8.1. In the following sections, findings about emerging outcomes drawing from a synthesis of insights from across all sources – qualitative and survey findings – are presented first. At the end of each section results from the survey specifically related to each emerging outcome are presented to give an indication of how widespread that outcome is across the system.

What does the evaluation tell us about the emerging outcomes of curriculum reform for learners?

Positive learner experiences

8.2. Most learners who took part in discussion groups as part of the curriculum journeys research reported positive learning experiences in school. Learners appreciated that their school encouraged them to work hard, providing appropriate support if and when they faced particular challenges in their learning. Many learners agreed that teachers are available to provide help when they needed it. As noted in Chapter 4, learners felt that the curriculum provided opportunities to learn about things that mattered to them from the world outside school. Learners expressed satisfaction with the breadth of the curriculum, with most who took part in the curriculum journeys research agreeing that they 'learn a wide variety of things in school'. Learners reported enjoying the project- and topic-based approaches, the experiences gained through visits outside school and the opportunities for outdoor learning (particularly among primary learners).

8.3. Senior leaders and teachers also generally perceived that learners' experiences of the curriculum were positive and that they were more engaged in their learning following the introduction of Curriculum for Wales. Qualitative research found that senior leaders and teachers felt some learners were aware of the change from a content-based curriculum (transmission of subject matter) to a process-oriented one (promoting meaningful understanding and skills development).

8.4. Learners were reported to feel safe and confident in knowing who to turn to for support, which positively impacted the overall school environment.

8.5. Learners were perceived by many senior leaders and teachers to be more engaged in their educational journey following the introduction of the curriculum reforms.

Practitioners felt that this was because the reforms had acted as a catalyst for overhauling pedagogical approaches toward enquiry, experiential, and authentic learning which was helping to improve engagement. Schools reported that they were focused on making learning relevant by integrating real-life contexts, current affairs, and community links to foster engagement. For Education other than at school (EOTAS) learners, a developmentally and pedagogically appropriate curriculum was reported to support improved engagement and motivation, as the focus was on personal development alongside academic progress. Some schools also observed a link between proactively planning and realising an inclusive curriculum that meets individual needs and improved levels of attendance among learners.

8.6. The majority of learners surveyed agreed with three of the six statements relating to their overall view of their curriculum experience at school, specifically that: their teachers help them to understand when they are getting better at learning (67%), they really enjoy going to school (66%), and they really enjoy what they are learning at school (63%). Slightly fewer, around half of the learners surveyed, agreed with the other three statements, specifically: that they feel they can be themselves at school (58% - asked of Year 3-9 learners only), get all the help they need at school (51%) and think school is fair for everyone (47%).

8.7. Primary school learners were consistently more positive in their survey responses about their experiences of teaching and learning than secondary school learners. A higher proportion of learners identified by their parents as being disabled, compared with those who were not identified by their parents as being disabled, reported that they got all the help they needed at school and that their teachers helped them understand when they were getting better at learning.

Mixed views among learners on progress towards the four purposes

8.8. The majority of learners surveyed agreed that their learning at school was helping them progress towards most aspects of the four purposes. The majority of learners agreed that their learning at school was helping them to:

- believe in themselves and what they can do (Reception to Year 6 learners), be the best they can be (Reception to Year 6)
- be healthier (Reception to Year 2 learners), become healthy and confident (Year 3 to 9 learners)

- think of new ideas (Reception to Year 6 learners), be more creative (Reception to Year 6), find ways to solve problems (Year 3 to 9 learners), be more aware of what is going in the world (Year 3 to 6 learners), and understand and care about people and the world (Reception to Year 6 learners)

8.9. Lower proportions of learners agreed that their learning was helping them to become ambitious (49% of Year 3-9 learners) and become ethical and informed (38% of Year 7-9 learners). [Footnote 9]

8.10. Where there were differences in survey responses relating to progression between different types of learner respondent, the pattern was that primary school learners were, in most cases, more positive than their secondary school counterparts: primary school learners were more likely than those in secondary schools to agree that their learning was helping them become ambitious, be more creative, solve problems and be healthy and confident.This pattern of responses echoed data collected during qualitative research with learners. Also, in most cases, disabled learners reported less positive views about their progress towards the four purposes than non-disabled learners.

8.11. Survey data showed that the extent to which learners felt their learning at school was helping them progress towards four purposes was strongly related to their relationship with the school. Survey data suggests that learners' perception of their progress towards the four purposes was strongly related to their level of trust in their school. Learners' perception of their progress towards the four purposes was also related to their perceptions of their well-being, but less strongly.

Learner engagement in curriculum design and greater ownership

8.12. The theory of change for the curriculum reforms included an outcome that learners should feel listened to and valued as school curricula are designed. Survey data revealed mixed views among learners about the opportunities given to them to influence their school curriculum, with a higher percentage of primary school learners indicating that they were consulted about curriculum design. Learners who participated in discussion groups mostly disagreed with or were unsure that they have a say in *what* they learn about in school. However, learners in primary and secondary schools reported that they occasionally get choices in *how* they complete

[9] Different age-appropriate variations of some questions, including those on the four purposes, were presented to learners in Reception to Year 2, Years 3 to 6 and Years 7 to 9

some of their work. Learners expressed a clear desire for more choice in curriculum content, proposing that topics their teachers identified as being important should be balanced with subjects they find interesting or essential life skills such as budgeting and paying bills, cooking and online safety. Learners suggested that ensuring they were able to influence the curriculum would improve morale and motivation for learning.

8.13. Many practitioners observed during the qualitative research that learners had developed an increased sense of ownership about their education and progress. New assessment practices often incorporated peer assessment and self-evaluation, which was reported to have fostered greater learner independence and responsibility. Practitioners perceived that this was because learners were actively supported to engage in self-assessment, to reflect on success criteria, and continuously improve their own work, ensuring they were central to the ongoing assessment process. In some cases, schools specifically utilised learner input and learner voice in curriculum design to further empower them to take ownership.

Well-being

8.14. The majority of learners surveyed expressed positive views in relation to their well-being, indicating that they felt they were good at some things (89%), and thought lots of people care about them (87%). The majority also agreed that there were many things they could be proud of (81%), that they had been getting on well with people (77%), that they thought good things will happen in their life (74%) and that they'd been in a good mood (73%).

8.15. Discussions with learners during curriculum journeys research included topics linked to well-being. Learners referred to a number of mechanisms or arrangements that were in place to support their social, emotional and mental well-being, including having named 'trusted adults' that they could approach to discuss personal or well-being issues (secondary school) and 'Thrive' groups (primary) where designated time was set aside for well-being sessions.

8.16. Learners in some schools referred to the ways in which teachers' behaviours supported their well-being and attitudes to learning more generally. These learners noted that positive encouragement, having a say in what is learned at school, and receiving help with their work when needed had a beneficial effect on their motivation and well-being.

8.17. Discussions indicated that learners' sense of well-being was influenced by the nature of the help received. Mixed experiences were reported across schools, with some reporting negative experiences, such as feeling they were being unfairly disciplined, being told to complete work before being given support, or feeling 'not listened to' when asking for assistance. In contrast, learners in other schools, described school environments where they felt positively supported by their teachers – in these examples, learners agreed that they received the help they needed and felt no one was afraid to ask for help.

Variability in what learners across different parts of the system are experiencing

8.18. The formative evaluation evidence consistently pointed to notable variability in practice and experience across the system, raising concerns among some practitioners about equity of experiences for learners. Learners in primary schools generally expressed more positive views than those in secondary schools. This included their views in relation to satisfaction with school and their own well-being. Their responses also indicated that they felt more involved in aspects of curriculum design with, for example, higher percentages of primary, compared with secondary, learners reporting that teachers listened to them and that they could tell teachers if they liked what they were learning about or not. Primary learners were also more likely than those in secondary schools to perceive that their learning at school was helping them to make progress towards the four purposes.

8.19. Non-disabled learners were more likely than disabled learners to have positive views on the curriculum and their education overall, including their satisfaction with aspects of teaching and learning and their own well-being. Non-disabled learners were also more likely than disabled learners to perceive that their learning at school was helping them make progress towards the four purposes.

8.20. Evidence from the qualitative studies indicated that there was variability between primary and secondary schools, as primary schools more readily adopted holistic approaches than secondary schools. Some practitioners perceived that there were significant transition challenges related to the bespoke nature of primary curricula, meaning learners arrive at secondary schools with diverse skill sets, which complicates planning for continuity and equity.

8.21. Other aspects of variability were evidenced across the qualitative studies, which were reported to be influencing learners' experiences of the curriculum. Some practitioners

perceived that schools already doing well were flourishing, while those facing greater challenges struggled, suggesting a risk that existing educational inequities could widen. The equity and inclusion qualitative study heard concerns expressed about socio-economic factors and unequal availability of resources potentially undermining efforts to ensure equity in curriculum realisation. In some cases, practitioners noted that socio-economic factors could contribute to variations in how schools respond to the reforms and potentially widen gaps in learner experiences and outcomes.

What does the evaluation tell us about the emerging outcomes of curriculum reform for parents and carers?

Engagement

8.22. Most schools reported engaging and consulting with parents/carers as part of their curriculum design processes, often through surveys or other communication methods. However, survey responses showed that experiences varied; some parents felt listened to, while others felt schools did not actively seek or respond to their feedback. Parents of learners in Welsh-medium schools were notably more likely to report opportunities to share ideas and give feedback than those in English-medium schools.

8.23. The majority of parents reported that where they had been given opportunities to be involved in, or informed about, curriculum design processes, this involvement made them feel motivated to support their child's education. Structural equation modelling suggests that the way in which school-parent collaboration on curriculum design is carried out may be important; particularly whether parents feel listened to and motivated by the process: simply providing opportunities for input was negatively related to parents' trust in their child's school.

Parent/carer perceptions of progress and confidence in the quality of education

8.24. Parents held mixed views about how the curriculum at their child's school is supporting progress towards Curriculum for Wales aspirations. Around half of parents agreed that the curriculum, teaching, and learning were helping their children become "healthy and confident" (55% agreed), "ethical and informed" (55% agreed), and "enterprising and creative" (53% agreed). Slightly less than half of parents (48% agreed) were confident their child was becoming "ambitious and capable". These

perceptions varied significantly by sector: secondary school parents consistently reported less positive views than primary school parents on their child's progress towards Curriculum for Wales aims.

8.25. Parents' perceptions of how curriculum, teaching and learning is helping their children to progress in other ways were mixed, with around half of parents agreeing that: their child's teachers understands their background, ability and individual needs (56%); their child's education supports their wellbeing (54%); their child's teachers provide the right support to enable my child to make progress (53%); their child's education is meeting their needs (43%) and their child's education is helping them reach their full potential (42%).

8.26. Parents' confidence in the school curriculum were also mixed, with around half agreeing that the school curriculum is helping their child prepare for the next steps in their education (52%) and helping them prepare for work and for life more generally (40% agreed, 33% disagreed).

8.27. Parents' satisfaction with their child's school indicated higher levels of satisfaction in relation to teachers and staff taking good care of their child (75%), being helpful (73%) being trustworthy (71%) and easily reachable (70%) and willing to listen to concerns (68%) compared with other elements of their child's education. However, only around half indicated overall that they are satisfied with their child's school (58%), feel that the school keeps them well informed (57%) or provides access to the extra help their child needs (49%).

8.28. Parents reported similarly mixed levels of satisfaction with the information they received about their child's progress, with around half reporting being satisfied with information about overall progress (55% satisfied), numeracy (56% satisfied), and literacy (53% satisfied). Only parents of secondary school learners were asked the extent to which they were satisfied with the information received about their child's progress in Welsh; a minority indicated that they were satisfied with this information. Furthermore, around half of parents agreed that they were satisfied with the method and the frequency of information-sharing about their child's progress. Parents of disabled learners expressed lower levels of satisfaction with information provided by schools about their child's progress.

8.29. Open-text survey responses revealed that some parents raised issues about how their child's progression would be measured, particularly primary parents. Secondary school parents more frequently raised concerns about qualifications, including GCSEs.

8.30. Statistical analysis of the relationships between grouped sets of questions in the parents' survey found that parents' trust in school [Footnote 10] was extremely strongly related to the promotion of parents' agency.[Footnote 11] Parents of disabled learners reported less confidence in the quality of education and in their school's ability to meet their child's needs compared to parents of other learners.

Varying levels of satisfaction with reforms

8.31. Though half (51%) of parents surveyed reported being supportive of the curriculum reforms overall, a quarter (25%) expressed dissatisfaction. The most significant areas of dissatisfaction revolved around assessment, qualifications, and transition. Some parents struggled with the perceived lack of clarity and specificity in assessment practices, finding it difficult to understand their child's progression compared to previous methods of reporting progress and attainment. A concern frequently raised was a perception that there was insufficient focus on cross-curricular skills such as literacy and numeracy. Additionally, some parents worried that the flexibility afforded by Curriculum for Wales made the curriculum too vague and open to interpretation, potentially leading to inconsistent educational standards and experiences across different schools.

What are the impacts on practitioners?

8.32. The realisation of the Curriculum for Wales has led to a number of emerging outcomes for practitioners, generally fostering positive professional commitment and agency, although constrained by persistent challenges related to time and capacity and inconsistency in how aspects of the Curriculum for Wales Framework were being realised across schools in Wales.

Commitment to Curriculum for Wales

8.33. Overall, the research found strong support for Curriculum for Wales principles among senior leaders and teachers. The vast majority of teaching senior leaders and

[10] Derived from questions on parents' satisfaction with their child's school overall as well as the quality and ease of communication with the school, the availability of support, the quality of care provided and parents' levels of trust in staff

[11] Derived from questions about the parents being listened to and having confidence in their child's education as well as parent motivation to support their child's education

teachers reported being willing to make changes to their professional practice to realise Curriculum for Wales aspirations. The majority of senior leaders considered themselves advocates for the reforms when speaking with colleagues. Additionally, around half of senior leaders viewed Curriculum for Wales as being much better than previous curriculum arrangements. Practitioners' responses to open-text survey questions about what they liked most about Curriculum for Wales suggest that the flexibility and freedom afforded by the Framework to design curricula tailored to their local contexts and learners' needs may be a contributory factor to this commitment. However, a minority of teachers agreed that the reforms were much better than the previous curriculum, and open-text responses highlighted concerns about the curriculum being too vague, open to interpretation, and leading to increased workload.

Deepened sense of purpose

8.34. The enactment of Curriculum for Wales had acted as a catalyst for overhauling teaching approaches in many schools. This process fostered a deepened sense of purpose among practitioners, prompting them to pay closer attention to the fundamental purpose of learning and leading to discussions about why specific content was being taught. This change was perceived to have prompted many teachers to embrace opportunities to demonstrate agency and creativity. Many senior leaders welcomed the flexibility provided under the new arrangements, viewing it as an opportunity to prioritise what they felt was most important for their learners. Furthermore, some schools used the curriculum design process to embark on a complete reform of the school structure and overall ethos.

Professional learning stimulated

8.35. Curriculum realisation has necessitated a substantial investment in professional learning for schools and settings, particularly concerning curriculum design, where practitioners often lacked expertise and/or prior experience. This resulted in dedicated time spent researching, engaging in professional learning activity, and consulting with various networks and external partners. Many practitioners reported establishing a strong culture of learning within their schools, leading to an increase in professional enquiry. Collaboration, especially within local clusters, served as a crucial source of professional learning, helping to share expertise, resources, and

ideas, ultimately improving practitioners' confidence. However, the ambitions and aspirations associated with Curriculum for Wales were reported to be constrained in many cases by a pervasive lack of time and financial resources required to release staff for development and collaboration.

Greater sense of satisfaction and confidence that learners will progress

8.36. A positive outcome for practitioners was a greater sense of professional satisfaction and agency. Many reported enjoying the flexibility to trial new ideas and felt the curriculum provided opportunities to fulfil their aspirations as teachers. Practitioners were largely positive about the potential benefits for learners. Survey data revealed that the vast majority of senior leaders (92%) expressed confidence that the school curriculum would support learners to develop in the ways described in the four purposes, and support learners to progress equally well regardless of their individual circumstances or starting points (89%). In addition, a majority of senior leaders (66%) and around half of teachers were confident that the new curriculum would lead to improved learner progression compared to the previous curriculum. However, this positive outlook was also accompanied by a note of caution, both in the survey and qualitative research, with the majority of senior leaders and teachers disagreeing that there is sufficient funding and time allocated to support work on Curriculum for Wales.

8.37. The majority of senior leaders and teachers expressed confidence that various aspects of the curriculum were being realised in their schools in a way that supports progression in line with the aspirations of the Framework. Teachers, for example, agreed they were confident that realisation will support learners to develop in the ways described in the four purposes (75%), will support learners equally well to progress, irrespective of their starting point (75%) or their individual circumstances (73%) and enable learners from low-income households to progress as fully as their peers" (66%).

9. Conclusions

Overarching conclusions

9.1. Evaluation evidence collected during the first two years of the study indicates that there has been good but variable progress overall in the realisation of Curriculum for Wales. Changes to curriculum practices in line with the intentions of the Framework are generally well underway. There is general support for the aspirations of Curriculum for Wales and the adoption of a purpose-led curriculum, which has been key to the initial progress made. There is evidence of a positive response to enacting the Curriculum for Wales Framework, as indicated by the substantial changes reported by the majority of senior leaders and teachers to aspects of curriculum planning, design, and pedagogical practice. While the Framework is not yet fully realised, and there is much progress still to be made, this is to be expected given the stage of realisation and the ongoing nature of the reforms.

9.2. The progress to date is tempered by evidence of notable **variability** in curriculum realisation across the system. This variability relates to how the Framework has been interpreted, how it has been enacted across the system (both in terms of the extent and quality of curriculum change), and how learners and parents/carers have experienced it. Senior leaders, teachers, learners and parents/carers from different types of settings, as well as parents of disabled learners give variable accounts, suggesting inequitable realisation that may lead to inequities, not only in experiences, but also in outcomes across the system. The wider context for this is that schools in many parts of Wales are facing resource constraints that are reported to impede the ability of some of these schools to support some types of learning experiences they consider important as part of an enriching and authentic curriculum. Addressing this variability will be important if the aspirations of Curriculum for Wales are to be fully realised not only in pockets of the system but for all, in ways that support goals for a high-equity system.

9.3. Senior leaders and teachers frequently gave different accounts of the extent and nature of progress in enacting Curriculum for Wales. These **discrepancies** evidenced in survey data, in particular, typically revealed senior leaders to have more positive perceptions of curriculum realisation than teachers. Specifically, a notably higher proportion of senior leaders agreed that there had been substantial changes to content, alignment of pedagogical practices with the Curriculum for Wales

Framework and assessment approaches compared to teachers. These discrepancies also extended to professional capability, as senior leaders were considerably more likely than teachers to report confidence in their own curriculum design expertise. Discrepancies like these highlighted in the survey data are problematic since they suggest that leaders may be unaware of areas that are less well-progressed than they thought, indicating differences in perspectives by role; additionally, the data could be seen as providing further evidence of the variability across the system. Both are problematic given the benefits of alignment in perceptions and shared understandings between leaders and teachers about progress made, and the need for consistency and coherence in curriculum realisation system-wide.

9.4. To build on these overarching conclusions, the following sections present conclusions relating to the individual chapters in this report.

Curriculum design

9.5. Extensive curriculum change, re-design and planning has taken place in schools, guided by the four purposes and the Curriculum for Wales Framework. The extent of this change appears to have varied, both at individual school level and between different types of schools, notably between primary and secondary schools. Integration of the various aspects of the Curriculum for Wales Framework was frequently reported in primary schools, supporting the breadth of learner experience, but evaluation evidence to date suggests that this tends to be less well developed in secondary schools. This suggests that a continued focus is required among partners across the system on fostering the required levels of commitment to, understanding of and capability in curriculum design, particularly among teachers and in secondary schools.

Pedagogical practices

9.6. Many schools have adopted pedagogical practices such as enquiry, experiential and authentic learning to enable the enactment of the curriculum and to respond to learner needs, although a much higher proportion of senior leaders compared to teachers consider this to be the case. Senior leaders and teachers reported that their practices are informed by and reflect the concepts and mandatory elements of the Curriculum for Wales Framework, including the pedagogical principles. Evidence indicates that approaches to teaching and learning are increasingly focused on being

responsive to individual learner need, through differentiation and targeted support. Evidence reveals that Curriculum for Wales has been a catalyst for a purposeful shift among practitioners towards learner-centred pedagogy, characterised by an increased focus on ‘teacher as facilitator’ approaches.

9.7. Based on evaluation evidence to date, there is variability between schools in pedagogical approaches: primary schools generally reported having adopted more holistic and interdisciplinary approaches, while there was less evidence of widescale pedagogical change in secondary schools. This suggests that continued professional development focused on pedagogical practice may be required to support secondary schools’ enactment of Curriculum for Wales.

Assessment

9.8. Changes in assessment practice have taken place in line with the Curriculum for Wales Framework and are focused on the needs and progression of individual learners, including a greater emphasis on formative learning and peer-assessment. Senior leaders more frequently referred to these changes in assessment practice compared to teachers. These practices were reported to be less well established in secondary compared to primary schools, something that was attributed by some practitioners to the need to prepare learners for external assessments.

9.9. The evaluation heard mixed views from learners and parents/carers about the support available to help them understand their progress. Learners generally reported feeling informed about their progress, with primary school learners more likely than secondary learners to respond positively in survey responses and qualitative research to questions about progression in their learning. Some learners felt that feedback on tasks and assessments was not always constructive and was sometimes unclear.

9.10. Around half of parents agreed that they were satisfied with how they received information about their child’s progress as well as how often they received information about their child’s progress. A minority of parents reported being dissatisfied with the information they had received about their child’s progress, finding it difficult to understand their child’s progression.

9.11. There remains, however, uncertainty in some schools about the assessment practices required by Curriculum for Wales, which has resulted in them retaining previous practices. This indicates a need for ongoing support to schools, particularly

secondary schools, in relation to developing their approaches to assessing learners' progress.

Enablers and constraints

9.12. The evidence provides insights into the conditions that are conducive to, or support, successful enactment of the Curriculum for Wales Framework. Of particular importance is the need to ensure high quality leadership and professional learning to support practitioner agency, commitment, knowledge, understanding and curriculum design capability. The report concludes that curriculum change and enactment has been either enabled or constrained by the following factors:

- **Leadership:** where this has been purposeful, based on a clear vision of how the curriculum can be enacted within the school and focused on appropriate learning and teaching pedagogy this has been a strong enabler; conversely, the success of new curriculum approaches was reported to be contingent on individual leadership capability, meaning that variability across the system arose where this capability was lacking, thereby constraining consistent, high-quality curriculum realisation.
- **Professional learning**: where high quality professional learning, including professional enquiry and access to research-informed practice has been in place, this has been an important enabler; however limited time and financial resources, along with workload pressures, continue to restrict access and engagement, leaving many senior leaders and teachers without sufficient support to meet their professional learning needs.
- **Leadership:** where this has been purposeful, based on a clear vision of how the curriculum can be enacted within the school and focused on appropriate learning and teaching pedagogy this has been a strong enabler; conversely, the success of new curriculum approaches was reported to be contingent on individual leadership capability, meaning that variability across the system arose where this capability was lacking, thereby constraining consistent, high-quality curriculum realisation.
- **Collaboration:** collaboration – both formal and informal – is a powerful driver of curriculum development, helping practitioners share expertise, build confidence, and innovate together. Qualitative research found that collaboration (in-school

collaboration and school-to-school working) made a substantial difference to schools' approaches to curriculum design and adaptations to pedagogy.

- **Professional enquiry:** where professional enquiry was taking place it was viewed as a valuable means of fostering a reflective culture within schools and supporting innovative practices. Some schools reported embedding enquiry through collaborative research, supporting thinking about new pedagogies and assessment practices. However, its adoption was relatively limited, with survey data indicating lower engagement among teachers than among senior leaders.
- **Curriculum design capability:** while senior leaders and teachers are expected to co-construct learner-centred curricula, many practitioners lack specific expertise in curriculum design, leading to inconsistent approaches across settings. As noted above, evidence indicates that curriculum capability improves where there is purposeful leadership and roles are clearly defined, however overall confidence in curriculum design remains relatively limited, particularly among teachers.
- **Guidance and exemplification:** schools reported that the Curriculum for Wales Framework has driven significant curriculum change, however many practitioners felt that Welsh Government guidance has been unclear, inconsistent, and insufficient to meet their needs.
- **Time and capacity:** the lack of sufficient time and financial resources to support areas such as curriculum design, professional learning and collaboration were reported to have been a significant constraint.
- **Teacher agency:** the freedom and flexibility afforded under the Framework was generally welcomed by practitioners. However, some practitioners voiced concerns about variability and equity of experience across Wales and some practitioners felt overwhelmed or were lacking in confidence.

Emerging outcomes

9.13. Data from learners reveals that their experiences under Curriculum for Wales have generally been positive. Many learners reported feeling supported to make progress and some also reported feeling empowered through greater ownership of their learning. Practitioners reported increased engagement among pupils in their learning, However, perceptions about progress vary, with secondary and disabled learners reporting less positive experiences than primary and non-disabled learners.

9.14. While survey findings indicated that there is a relationship between parent agency (being listened to, having confidence in and being motivated to support their child's education) and their meaningful engagement in curriculum design, the extent of their involvement and engagement with schools vary widely. Confidence in the curriculum and its ability to meet individual learner needs is mixed, with parents of disabled learners expressing lower levels of satisfaction. Concerns remain around the clarity of assessment and skills development, highlighting the need for more consistent school-parent communication and support.

9.15. There is commitment to the Curriculum for Wales among senior leaders and teachers, with many embracing the principles of the Framework and the flexibility it offers to tailor learning to local needs, enabling schools to realise a more inclusive curriculum for all learners. The reforms have contributed to senior leaders' and teachers' sense of purpose and encouraged creativity, leading some schools to re-evaluate their ethos and approaches. Overall, there is confidence that the curriculum supports learner development and progression, however findings suggest that sustaining progress and achieving longer term outcomes for learners and the wider system will require ongoing support and investment.

10. Issues for consideration

10.1. The insights from this evaluation give rise to three important issues to prioritise as part of the next stage of the curriculum realisation journey across Wales. These priorities are:

i. **Tackling variability in curriculum realisation across the system:** this includes variability in how the Framework has been understood and interpreted, the extent and quality of its enactment, and how it has been experienced by learners and parents/carers.

ii. **Enhancing and deepening practitioner understanding of the Curriculum for Wales Framework,** encouraging greater ambition among schools, settings and all system partners in making use of the flexibility afforded by the Framework.

iii. **Strengthening and enhancing further the quality of curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment practices** to increase rigour, build capability, and improve practice in ways that positively impact all learners' experience and outcomes.

10.2. The enablers introduced earlier in this report provide a focus for curriculum realisation efforts – leadership, professional learning, collaboration, curriculum design capability, guidance, time and capacity. Considering those enablers in light of the particular priorities outlined about tackling variability, deepening understanding, and enhancing the quality of practice leads us to propose three pillars that should underpin the approach to addressing the priorities. We also make explicit why each pillar is important for the three priority issues outlined above. The pillars are:

a. **A system perspective** that recognises the interconnectedness and interactions between parts of the system (the organisations, agencies, initiatives, policies, programmes, tools and resources etc.) that support curriculum realisation.

   A system perspective is important for:

   - **tackling variability** because it positions the system as a whole as responsible for variability – all players have a role to play, and a role in supporting others.

- **deepening understanding** because those in different parts of the system bring different perspectives to what aspects of the curriculum mean, and the perspectives of partners from across the system can help enhance and deepen understanding.
- **enhancing the quality of professional practice** because the work of those across the system determines how conducive the conditions are for teachers and leaders to explore new practices

b. **A networked infrastructure for curriculum leadership** that a) recognises ongoing success is dependent on the relationships between those working to support curriculum realisation and b) is focused on, and conducive to, developing curriculum leadership efficacy, solving problems and supporting improvement in curriculum, teaching and learning. It is important to underline that curriculum leaders can be senior leaders and teachers in a wide range of positions, i.e. those who lead and/or participate in networks with a view to leading aspects of curriculum realisation in their schools or settings.

   A networked infrastructure for curriculum leadership is important for:

   - **tackling variability** because it creates networks of relationships that will allow information, resources, ideas, expertise etc. to flow across the system
   - **deepening understanding** because it builds relationships that connect people with different understandings and strengths in ways that they become resources for each other.
   - **enhancing the quality of professional practice** because it supports increased trust that is essential to taking well-considered risks, trying new things, sharing challenges and supporting colleagues' learning.

c. **A systematic and robust approach to professional learning that is embedded as part of schools' curriculum design activity.** This should allow for sustained, rigorous professional enquiry, integrating insights and expertise from research and practice, the sharing of expertise across the system and collaboration that effects change and strengthens the capability of all involved and the capacity of the system. In practice, this could involve employing

participative enquiry-based approaches to professional learning that both support professional development and inform curriculum development/realisation at the same time.

A systematic and embedded approach to professional learning is important for:

- **tackling variability** because it can be systematically focused on parts of the system, and aspects of the curriculum where the need is greatest
- **deepening understanding** because robust and systematic professional learning allows for weak spots to be addressed, and gaps between what is actually happening and what was intended to be addressed. Robust approaches support teachers to progress from surface to deep understandings of the curriculum they are working with and how their practice can improve in support of that.
- **enhancing the quality of professional practice** because it recognises the inadequacy of quick fixes, tips and tricks, and the necessity for more sustained approaches that are tightly connected to teachers' own contexts and work.

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